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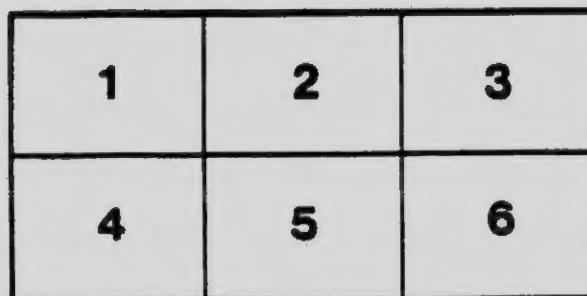
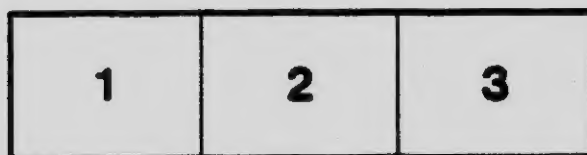
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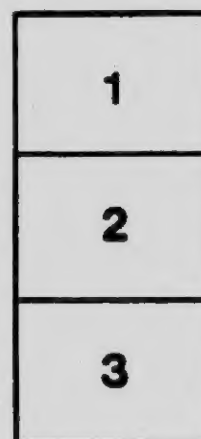
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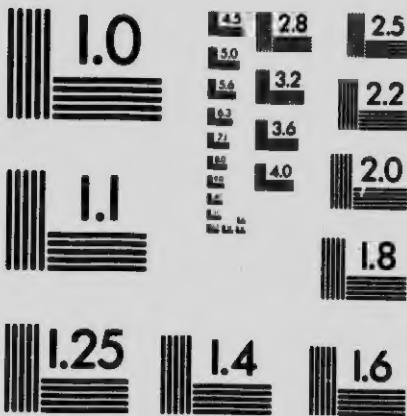
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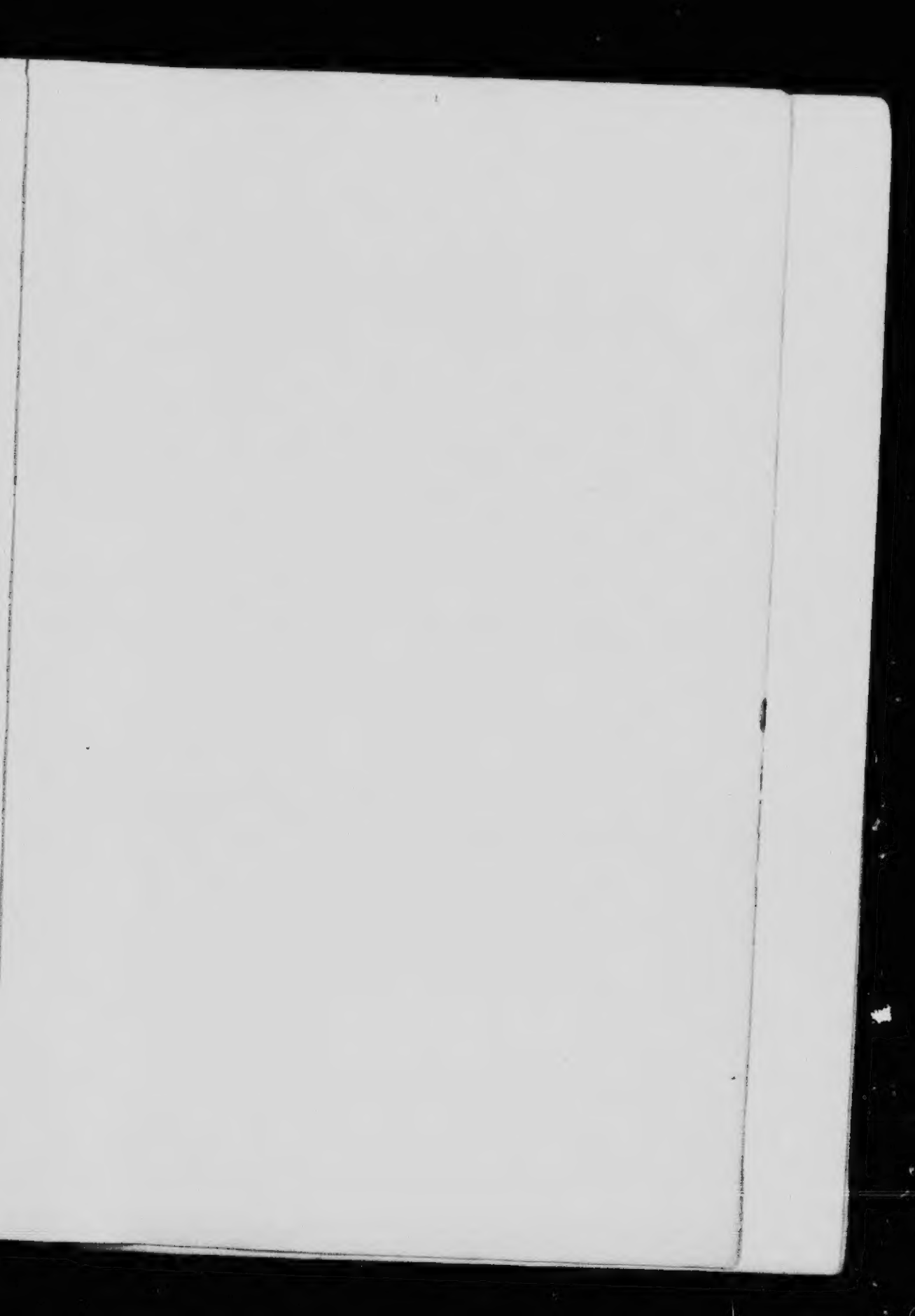
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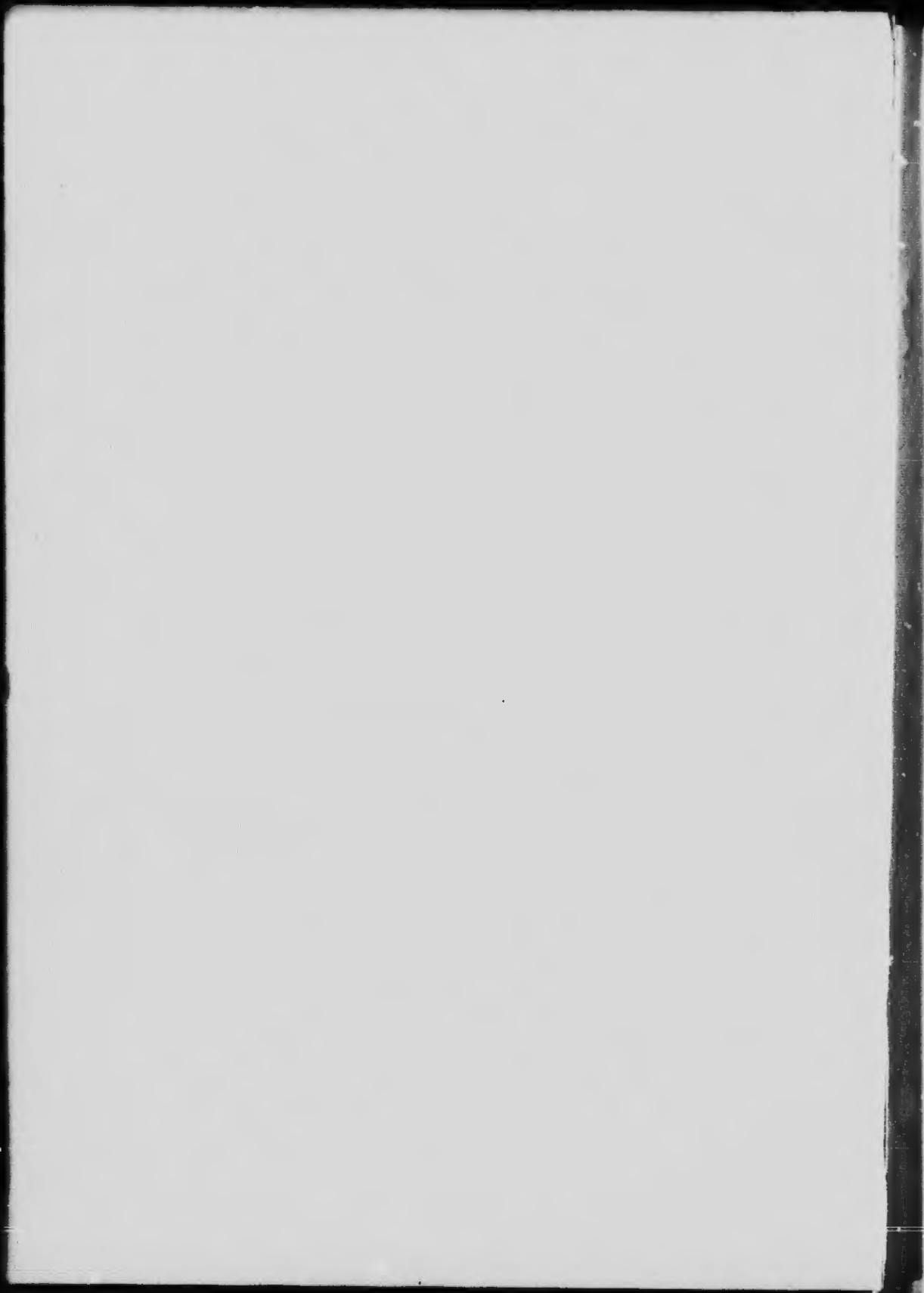
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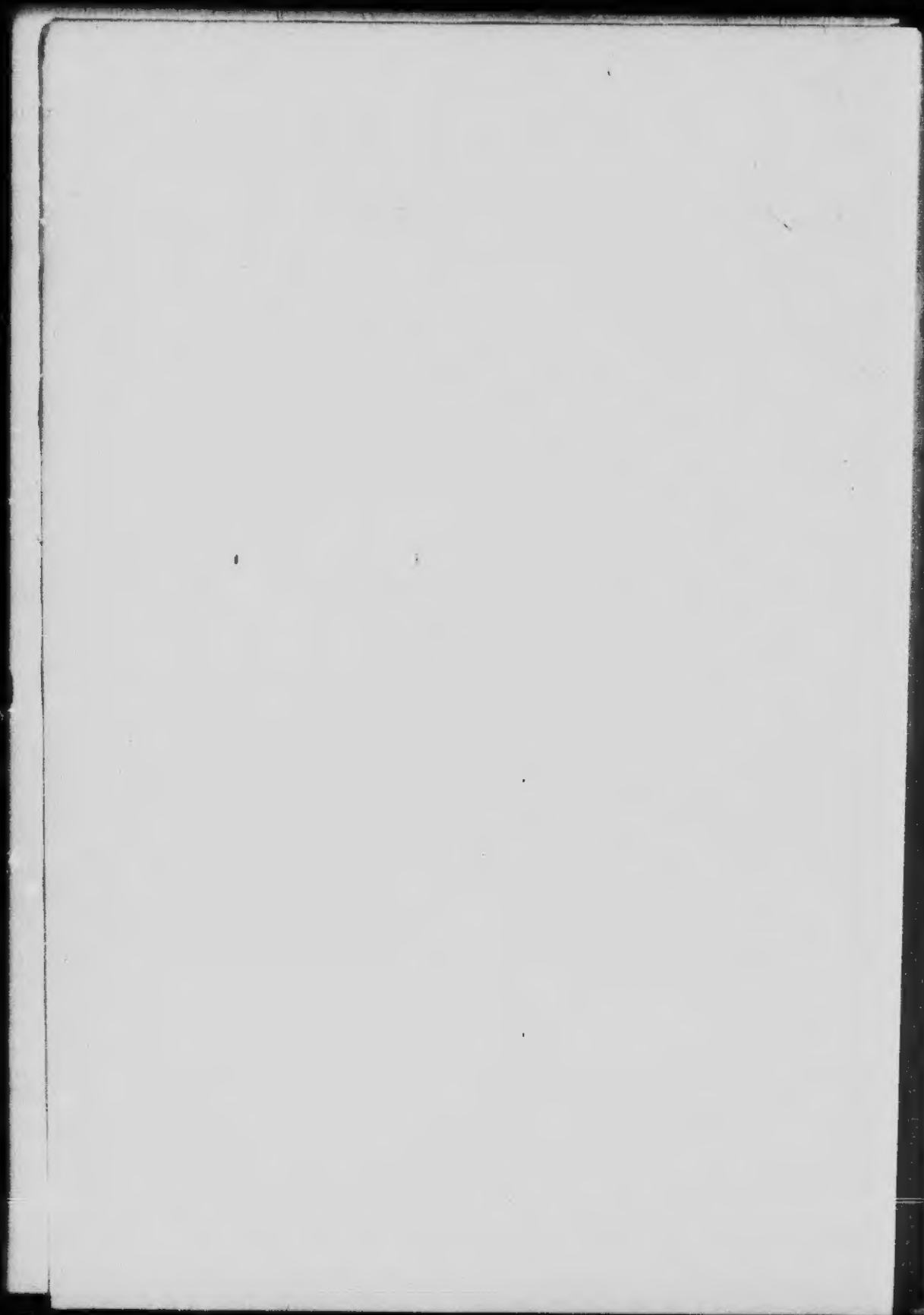
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**THE ADVENTURES OF
CAPTAIN O'SHEA**



THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN O'SHEA

BY
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**THE ADVENTURES OF
CAPTAIN O'SHEA**

THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN O'SHEA

THE CASTAWAYS

I

WHEN the Cubans, led by Gomez and Maceo, were waging their final rebellion against the immemorial tyranny of Spain, it may be recalled that there was much filibustering out of American ports, and a lively demand for seafaring men of an intrepid temper who could be relied on to keep their eyes open and their mouths shut. Such a one was young Captain O'Shea, and, moreover, he was no amateur at this ticklish industry, having already "jolted one presidente off his perch in Hayti, and set fire to the coat-tails of another one in Honduras," as he explained to the swarthy gentlemen of the Cuban Junta in New York, who passed on his credentials.

They gave him a sea-going tug called the *Fearless*, permitted him to pick his own crew, and told him where to find his cargo, in a fairly lonesome inlet of the Florida coast. Thereafter he was to work out his own salvation. The programme was likely to be anything else than monotonous. To

be nabbed by a Yankee cruiser in home waters for breaking the laws of nations meant that Captain O'Shea would cool his heels in a Federal jail, a mishap most distasteful to a man of a roving disposition. To run afoul of the Spanish blockading fleet in Cuban waters was to be unceremoniously shot full of holes and drowned in the bargain.

Such risks as these were incidental to his trade, and Captain O'Shea maintained his cheerful composure until the *Fearless* had taken her explosive cargo on board and was dropping the sandy coastline of Florida over her stern. Then he scrutinized his passengers and became annoyed. The Junta had sent him a Cuban colonel and forty patriots, recruited from the cigar factories of Tampa and Key West, who ardently, even clamorously, desired to return to their native land and fight for the glorious cause of liberty.

Their organization was separate from that of the ship's company. It was not the business of Captain O'Shea to enforce his hard-fisted discipline among them, nor did he have to feed them, for they had brought their own stores on board. Early in the voyage he expressed his superheated opinion of the party to the chief engineer. The twain stood on the little bridge above the wheel-house, the clean-built, youthful Irish-American skipper, and the beefy, gray-headed Johnny Kent, whose variegated career had begun among the Yankees of 'way down East.

The deck-laden *Fearless* was wallowing through the uneasy seas of the Gulf Stream. The Cuban

patriots were already sea-sick in squads, and they lay helpless amid an amazing disorder of weapons, blankets, haversacks, valises, and clothing. Now and then the crest of a sea flicked merrily over the low guard-rail and swashed across the pallid sufferers.

"Did ye ever see such a mess in all your born days?" disgustedly observed Captain O'Shea. "And we will have to live with this menagerie for a week or so, Johnny."

"It'll be a whole lot worse when all of 'em are took sea-sick," was the discouraging reply. "Dog-gone 'em, they ain't even stowed their kits away. They just flopped and died in their tracks. Why don't you make their colonel kick some savvey into 'em, eh, Cap'n Mike?"

"Colonel Calvo?" and O'Shea spat to leeward with a laugh. "He is curled up in the spare state-room, and his complexion is as green as a starboard light. There is one American in the lot. Wait till I fetch him up."

A deck-hand was sent into the dismal chaos, and there presently returned in his wake a lean, sandy man in khaki who clutched an old-fashioned Springfield rifle. At a guess his years might have been forty, and his visage had never a trace of humor in it. Much drill had squared his shoulders and flattened his back, and he stiffly saluted Captain O'Shea.

"Who are you, and what are ye doing in such amazin' bad company?" asked the latter.

"My name is Jack Gorham, sir. I served four enlistments in the Fifth Infantry, and I have medals

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for marksmanship. The Cubans took me on as a sharp-shooter. They promised me a thousand dollars for every Spanish officer I pick off with this old gun of mine. I have a hundred and fifty rounds. You can figure it out for yourself, sir. I'll be a rich man."

"Provided ye are not picked off first, me hopeful sharp-shooter. Are there any more good men in your crowd?"

The old regular dubiously shook his head as he answered:

"There's a dozen or so that may qualify on dry land. The rest ain't what you'd call reliable comrades-in-arms."

"Oh, they may buck up," exclaimed Captain O'Shea. "Look here, Gorham, you can't live on deck with those sea-sick swine. Better go for'ard and bunk with my crew."

Jack Gorham looked grateful, but firmly declared: "Thank you, sir, I belong with the Cuban outfit, and I'll take my medicine. It would make bad feeling if I was to quit 'em. They are as jealous and touchy as children. I have a tip for you. There is one ugly lad in the bunch, the big, black nigger settin' yonder on the hatch. They tell me he comes from Colombia and left there two jumps ahead of the police."

They gazed down at the powerful figure of the negro, whose tattered shirt disclosed swelling ridges of muscle and more than one long scar defined in pink against the shining black skin. Thick-lipped,

flat-nosed, he was the primitive African savage whose ancestors had survived the middle passage in the hold of a Spanish slaver. He was snarling and grumbling to a group of Cubans, and Captain O'Shea pricked up his ears.

"Raising a row about the grub, is he? 'Tis a pity he could not be sea-sick early and often."

"Why don't you crack him over the head with a belayin'-pin just for luck?" amiably suggested the chief engineer. "It would sweeten him up considerable."

"I am carrying them as passengers, you blood-thirsty old buccaneer," retorted O'Shea. "I must keep me hands off till they really mix things up. But I do not like the looks of the big nigger. He is one of your born trouble-hunters."

"You take my advice and beat him up good and plenty before he gets started," was the sage farewell of Johnny Kent as he lumbered below to exhort his oilers and stokers.

The night came down and obscured the hurrying tug whose course was laid for the Yucatan passage around the western end of Cuba. The lights of a merchant-steamer twinkled far distant and Captain O'Shea sheered off to give her a wide berth. He had no desire to be sighted or reported.

To him, keeping lookout on the darkened bridge, came his cook, a peaceable mulatto who had a grievance which he aired as follows:

"Please, cap'n, them Cubans what ain't sea-sick is actin' powerful unreasonable. I lets 'em heat their

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stuff and make coffee in my galley, but I ain't 'sponsible for th' rations they all draws. That big, black niggah is stirrin' 'em up. Jiminer, they calls him. At supper-time to-night, cap'n, he 'ried to swipe some of th' crew's bacon and hash, and I had to chase 'em outen th' galley."

"All right, George. I will keep an eye on him tomorrow," said the skipper. "Between you and me the Cuban party did not bring enough provisions aboard to run them on full allowance for the voyage. There was graft somewhere. But I'm hanged if they can steal any of my stores. We may need every pound of them. I will see to it that your galley isn't raided. And if this big bucko Jiminez gets gay again, give him the tea-kettle and scald the black hide off him—understand?"

"Yes, suh, cap'n; I'll parboil him if you'll look out he don't carve me when he's done recuperated."

The cook descended to his realm of pots and pans while Captain O'Shea reflected that the voyage might be even livelier than he had anticipated. With calm weather his forty passengers would recover their appetites and demand three meals per day. They might whine and grumble over the shortage, but without a leader they were fairly harmless.

"I will have to lock horns with the big nigger before he gets any more headway," soliloquized Captain O'Shea.

For once he heartily desired high winds and rough seas, but the following morning brought weather so

much smoother that the pangs of hunger took hold of the reviving patriots, who arose from the coal-sacks and crowded to the galley windows. The cook toiled with one eye warily lifted lest the formidable negro from Colombia should board him unawares.

Captain O'Shea leaned over the rail of his bridge and surveyed the scene. Black Jiminez was making loud complaint in his guttural Spanish patois, but his following was not eager to encounter the rough-and-tumble deck-hands of the *Fearless*, besides which the prudent cook hovered within easy distance of the steaming tea-kettle.

To the amusement of Captain O'Shea, it was that lathy sharp-shooter of the serious countenance, Jack Gorham, who took it upon himself to read the riot act to the big negro. He regarded himself and his duty with a profound, unshaken gravity. Jiminez overtopped him by a foot, but pride of race and self-respect would not permit him to knuckle under to the black bully.

"Will ye look at the Gorham man?" said Captain O'Shea to the chief engineer who had joined him. "He is bristlin' up to the nigger like a terrier pup. And Jiminez would make no more than two bites of him."

"How can the soldier do anything else?" exclaimed Johnny Kent. "He's the only white man in the bunch."

"I may as well let him know that I am backin' his game," observed the other. He sang out to

Gorham, and the veteran infantryman climbed to the bridge, where he stood with heels together, hat in hand. His pensive, freckled countenance failed to respond to the captain's greeting smile.

"Unless I am mistaken, Gorham, ye have it in mind to tackle a job that looks a couple of sizes too large for you. Will ye start a ruction with Jiminez?"

"Until the colonel gets on his legs I'm the man to take charge of the party, sir," answered the soldier, reflectively rubbing the bald spot which shone through his thinning thatch of sandy hair.

"But I expect to take a hand," petulantly declared the captain. "This is my ship."

"Excuse me, sir," and Gorham's accents were most apologetic. "This is your ship, but it ain't your party. The patriots are a separate command. The big nigger belongs to me. If I don't discourage him, I lose all chance of winnin' promotion in the Cuban army. If he downs me, I'll be called a yellow dog from one end of the island to the other. I intend to earn my shoulder-straps."

"And you will climb this big, black beggar, and thank nobody to interfere?" asked the admiring Captain O'Shea.

"It is up to me, sir."

"You strain me patience, Gorham. If ye have any trinkets and messages to send to your friends, better give them to me now."

Said the chief engineer when the soldier was out of ear-shot:

"Does he really mean it, Cap'n Mike? He'll sure be a homely-lookin' corpse."

"Mean it? That lantern-jawed lunatic wouldn't know a joke if it hit him bows on."

"Will you let him be murdered?"

"We will pry the big nigger off him before it goes as far as that. Have ye not learned, Johnny Kent, that it is poor business to come between a man and his good intentions, even though they may be all wrong?"

Later in the day Captain O'Shea sought the state-room of the prostrate Colonel Calvo. The sea was a relentless foe and showed him no mercy. Feebly moving his hands, he turned a ghastly face to the visitor and croaked:

"I have no interes' in my mens, in my country, in nothings at all. I am dreadful sick. I will no' live to see my Cuba. She will weep for me. The ship, she will sink pretty soon? I hope so."

"Nonsense, colonel," bluffly returned O'Shea. "The weather couldn't be finer. A few days more of this and ye will be wading in Spanish gore to your boot-tops. I want to ask about your stores. Your men are growlin'. Who is in charge of the commissary?"

"Talk to me nothings about eats," moaned the sufferer. "Why do anybody want eats? Come tomorrow, nex' day, nex' week. Now I have the wish to die with peace."

"The sooner, the better," said the visitor, and departed.

The *Fearless*, with explosives in the hold and inflammable humanity above-decks, pursued her hard-driven way through another night and turned to double Cape San Antonio and enter the storied waters of the Caribbean. Black Jiminez had failed to play the rôle expected of him and the discontent of the patriots focussed itself in no open outbreak. Captain O'Shea was puzzled at this until the mate came to him and announced that the Cubans had broken through a bulkhead in the after-hold and were stealing the ship's stores. This accounted for their good behavior on deck. The leader of the secret raiding party was the big negro from Colombia.

"It seems to me that this is *my* business," softly quoth the skipper, and his gray eyes danced while he pulled his belt a notch tighter. "But I must play fair and ask permission of the melancholy sharp-shooter before I proceed to make a vacancy in the Jiminez family."

The interview with Gorham was brief. The captain argued that by breaking through a bulkhead and pilfering the crew's provisions, the large black one had invaded the O'Shea domain. The soldier held to it with the stubbornness of a wooden Indian that his own self-respect was at stake. O'Shea lost his temper and burst out:

"If ye are so domned anxious to commit suicide, go and get him and put him in irons. I will give you a decent burial at sea, though ye don't deserve it, you pig-headed old ramrod."

"The moral effect will be better if I get him," mildly suggested the soldier.

The Cubans had learned that trouble was in the wind. Their stolen supplies were to be cut off and this meant short rations again. Angry and rebellious, only a spark was needed to set them ablaze. When eight bells struck the noon hour they surged toward the galley, making a great noise, displaying their sea-rusted machetes and rifles. In the lead was Jiminez, a half-clad, barbaric giant who waved a heavy blade over his head and shouted imprecations. The purpose of the mob was to rush the galley and carry off all the food in sight.

The crew of the *Fearless* liked not the idea of going dinnerless. When the excited patriots charged forward, there quickly rallied in front of the deck-house fourteen earnest-looking men equipped with Mauser rifles broken out of the cargo. In a wheel-house window appeared the head and shoulders of Captain O'Shea. His fist held a piece of artillery known as a Colt's forty-five. In the background of the picture was the resourceful Johnny Kent, who was coupling the brass nozzle of the fire-hose.

Jiminez had decided to declare war. He appealed to the patriots to use their weapons, but they showed a prudent reluctance to open the engagement. One of them, by way of locating the responsibility for the dispute, pulled a revolver from a holster and took a snap-shot at the cook.

"I guess I'd better turn loose this hose and wash 'em aft, Cap'n Mike," sung out the chief engineer.

"George is a darned good cook and it ain't right to let these black-and-tans pester him."

Captain O'Shea bounded from the bridge to the deck, and the crew of the *Fearless* welcomed him with joyous yelps. Instead of giving them the expected order to charge the Cubans hammer-and-tongs, he made for Jiminez single-handed. His intention was thwarted. Between him and the burly negro appeared the spare figure of Jack Gorham, who moved swiftly, quietly. With courteous intonation and no sign of heat he affirmed:

"This is my job, sir. It's about time to put a few kinks in him."

The manner of the man made Captain O'Shea hesitate and feel rebuked, as though he had been properly told to mind his own business. With a boyish grin he slapped Gorham on the back and said:

"I beg your pardon for intrudin'. 'Tis your funeral."

Although the mob behind Jiminez failed to catch the wording of this bit of dialogue, they comprehended its import. The extraordinary composure of the two men impressed them. They felt more fear of them than of the embattled deck-hands. The tableau lasted only a moment, but a singular silence fell upon the ship.

Big Jiminez nervously licked his lips and his blood-shot eyes roved uneasily. It was apparent that he had been singled out as the leader, and that the sad-featured American soldier in the sea-stained

khaki viewed him as no more than an incident in the day's work.

Captain O'Shea had stepped back to join his own men. Jack Gorham stood alone in a small cleared space of the deck, facing the truculent negro. The Cubans began to edge away from Jiminez as if comprehending that here was an issue between two men. The soldier had for a weapon that beloved old Springfield rifle, but he made no motion to shoot.

Presently he sprang forward, with the heavy butt upraised. The negro swung his machete at the same instant and the blade was parried by the steel barrel. The mob had become an audience. It lost its menacing solidarity and drifted a little way aft to make room for the combatants. Instead of riot or mutiny, the trouble on board the *Fearless* had defined itself as a duel.

The veteran regular handled the clubbed rifle with amazing ease and dexterity. The wicked machete could not beat down his guard, and he stood his ground, shifting, ducking, weaving in and out, watching for an opening to smash the negro's face with a thrust of the butt. Once the blade nicked Gorham's shoulder and a red smear spread over the khaki tunic.

Jiminez was forced back until he was cramped for room to swing. His machete rang against a metal stanchion and the galley window was at his elbow. His black skin shining with sweat, his breath labored, the splendid brute was beginning to realize that he had met his master. From the

tail of his eye he observed that the Cubans no longer thronged the passageway between the deck-house and guard-rail. He turned and ran toward the stern.

Gorham was after him like a shot. In his wake scampered the crew of the *Fearless* intermingled with the Cubans, all anxious to be in at the finish. Jiminez wheeled where the deck was wide. He was not as formidable as at first. Fear was in his heart. He had never fought such a man as this insignificant-looking American soldier, who was unterrified, unconquerable. Gorham ran at him without an instant's hesitation, the rifle gripped for a downward swing. The machete grazed his head and chipped the skin from the bald spot.

Before Jiminez could strike again, the butt smote his thick skull and he staggered backward. Caught off his balance, his machete no longer dangerous, he was unable to avoid the next assault. Gorham moved a step nearer and deftly tapped his adversary with the rifle-butt. It was a knock-out blow delivered with the measured precision of a prize-ring artist. The machete dropped from the negro's limp fingers and he toppled across two sacks of coal with a sighing grunt.

The crew of the *Fearless* broke into a cheer. The mate on duty in the wheel-house let the vessel steer herself and scrambled to the bridge, where he was clumsily dancing a jig. The Cubans chattered among themselves in subdued accents, and from the state-room door peered the wan countenance of Colo-

nel Calvo, who was wringing his hands and sputtering commands to which nobody paid the slightest attention.

Jack Gorham stood swaying slightly, leaning upon his Springfield, and wiped the blood from his eyes with the back of his hand. A moment later Captain O'Shea had both arms around him and was bellowing in his ear:

"We will hoist ye into a bunk, Jack. Oh, but you are the jewel of a fightin' man! I hope ye were not hurt bad."

"Nothing to speak of, sir, but my wind isn't what it was," panted Gorham. "Better look after the nigger first. I didn't plan to kill him."

The chief engineer was dragging the hose aft with the praiseworthy intention of washing down the combatants, and the captain told him to turn the cool salt-water on the prostrate bulk of the negro.

"I'll play nurse to him if you haven't spoiled him entirely," said Johnny Kent. "I need more help down below and he'll make a dandy hand with a coal-shovel when his head is mended."

Just then the mate, who had returned to the wheel, yelled to Captain O'Shea and jerked the whistle-cord. The skipper ran forward and bolted into the wheel-house. With a flourish of his arm the mate indicated a small boat lifting and falling on the azure swells no more than a few hundred yards beyond the bow of the tug. The occupants were vigorously signalling by means of upraised oars and articles of clothing.

The captain rang the engine-room bell to slacken speed and stared at the boat-load of castaways which had none of the ear-marks of shipwreck and suffering. The white paint of the boat was unmarred by the sea and the handsome brass fittings were bright. Two seamen in white clothes were at the oars, and in the stern-sheets were two women and a young man who could not be mistaken for the ordinary voyagers of a trading-vessel's cabin.

"I ought to have called you sooner, sir," sheepishly confessed the mate of the *Fearless*, "but I was watching the shindy on deck, same as all hands of us. What do you make of it?"

"It looks like a pleasure party," said Captain O'Shea. "I am puzzled for fair."

He ordered the engines stopped and the *Fearless* drifted slowly toward the boat. The ship's company flocked to the rail to see the castaways, who gazed in their turn at the picturesque throng of twentieth-century buccaneers—the swarthy, unshaven Cubans with their flapping straw hats, bright handkerchiefs knotted at the throat, their waists girded with cartridge-belts, holsters, and machete-scabbards—and the sunburnt, reckless rascals of the crew.

There were symptoms of consternation in the small boat as it danced nearer the crowded rail of the *Fearless*, also perceptibly less eagerness to be rescued. This was making a choice between the devil and the deep sea. It was now possible to discern that of the two women in the stern of the boat

one was elderly and the other girlishly youthful. Both wore white shirt-waists and duck skirts, and the young man was smartly attired in a blue double-breasted coat, of a nautical cut, and flannel trousers. One might have supposed that the party was being set ashore from a yacht instead of tossing adrift in a lonely stretch of the Caribbean beyond sight of land.

Captain O'Shea surveyed them with a dismayed air. He was not equipped for the business of rescuing shipwrecked people of such fashionable appearance; and as for taking two women on board the *Fearless*, here was a complication to vex the soul of an industrious, single-minded filibuster. However, he was a sailor and an Irishman, and his honest heart responded to the appeal of femininity in distress. The steps were hung over the tug's side to make the transfer from the boat as easy as possible, and a deck-hand stood ready with a coil of heaving-line. From the bridge Captain O'Shea hailed the derelicts.

"For the love of heaven, who are you and where do ye come from, so spick and span? What is it all about, anyhow?"

The young man in the stern answered in somewhat nettled tones:

"It seems more to the point to ask who you are. We are in a deucedly bad fix, and these ladies ought to be taken aboard; but do you mind if I ask whether you intend to make us walk the plank? My word, but you are a frightfully hard-looking lot. Is Captain Kidd with you?"

It was O'Shea's turn to be ruffled, and he flung back:

"You seem mighty particular about your comfort. 'Tis a nuisance for me to bother with ye at all."

"Oh, the ladies can't drift about in this open boat any longer," the young man hastened to exclaim. "I shall pay you handsomely to set us ashore at the nearest port."

"And what would I be doing in the nearest port?" the skipper muttered with a grin. "Well, there is no sense in slingin' words to and fro. Let them come aboard and find out for themselves."

Running to the rail to assist these unwelcome guests, he called to the self-possessed young man in the boat:

"How long have ye been adrift?"

"Since midnight. Our yacht ran on a reef and broke her back. Before daylight we lost sight of the other boats."

Captain O'Shea said nothing more. His interest veered to the girl, who had been shielding her face from the blistering glare of sun and sea. Now, as she looked up at the tug which towered above the boat, the impressionable skipper perceived that her face was fair to see, and that she smiled at him with friendly confidence. Presently he was lending her a steadying hand as she clung to the swaying rail of the tug and found foothold on the steps over which the waves washed.

"You are a plucky one and no mistake!" exclaimed

Captain O'Shea. "A man might think ye enjoyed it."

"I do," said she, shaking the water from her skirt as she gained the deck. "Now please get my aunt aboard as carefully as you can. She has a touch of rheumatism."

Without mishap the elderly lady was assisted to accomplish the acrobatic feat of forsaking the bobbing boat, after which the young man and the sailors were allowed to shift for themselves. Leather hand-bags, steamer-rugs, and canned provisions were tossed to the deck and the boat was turned adrift, for there was no room to stow it on board. Immediately the *Fearless* forged ahead and picked up her course at full speed.

To an elderly spinster of refinement whose years had been spent in a sheltered, effete civilization, mostly bounded by Massachusetts, the deck of the *Fearless* was an environment shocking beyond words. The chief engineer had resumed his interrupted task of playing the hose on the senseless, half-naked bulk of black Jiminez. Jack Gorham, more or less ensanguined, was stretched upon a hatch, where the surgeon of the Cuban party had detained him to sponge and stitch his shoulder and bandage his head. Near by hovered the disreputable patriots, begrimed with coal-dust and bristling with deadly weapons.

The elderly lady stared with eyes opened very wide. Her lips moved, but made no sound, and her delicately wrinkled cheek grew pale. At length she managed to whisper to her niece that dread saying

familiar to many generations of New England spinsters:

"Mercy! We shall all be murdered in our beds."

Captain O'Shea joined them, to speak his earnest reassurances.

"You are as safe as if you were in Sunday-school, ladies. This bunch of patriots is perfectly harmless. There was an argument just before we sighted ye, and the best man won."

"And what is this voyage of yours, captain?" asked the girl.

"Oh, we are just romancin' around the high-seas. 'Tis nothing that would interest a lady."

"Do you kill each other every day?"

"You mean the big nigger yonder?" and Captain O'Shea looked a trifle embarrassed. "No, his manners had to be corrected. But will you come for'ard, please, and make yourselves at home in my room? 'Tis yours as long as ye are on board."

"I am quite sure you have no intention of murdering us," smilingly quoth the girl. "And we shall ask you no more questions for the present. Come along, Aunt Katharine."

The young man of the castaways was fidgeting rather sulkily in the background. He wished to interview the captain at once, but the gallant O'Shea had eyes only for the ladies. Overlooked and apparently forgotten, the shipwrecked young man picked his way across the deck to accost Johnny Kent, whose first-aid-to-the-injured treatment with a hose-nozzle had proved efficacious. The van-

quished negro was rubbing his head and sputtering salt-water and Spanish.

"There, you're what I call recussitated in bang-up good style," cried the engineer, proud of his handiwork. "If you were a white man, your block 'ud have been knocked clean off. You ought to be thankful for your mercies."

The castaway touched his arm and exclaimed:

"I say, my good man, I need something to eat, and a place to sleep. I was awake all night in an open boat."

The stout person in the greasy overalls turned to survey the speaker with mild amusement on his broad, red face.

"By the look of your party you must have suffered something awful. The skipper will attend to you pretty soon and he'll do his best to make you happy. But this ain't no gold-plated yacht, and it ain't no table dote hotel."

"So I see, but I'll pay for the best on board. Really, money is no object——"

Johnny Kent chuckled and turned to wave the nozzle at the negro, who was sitting up.

"You subside, Jiminez, or I'll dent this over your head. It ain't healthy for you to get well too darned fast."

He scrutinized the castaway with a tolerant, fatherly air and answered him:

"Better stow that you-be-damned manner of yours, young man. We're outlaws, liable to be blown out of water any blessed minute. Those

tarriers for'ard had just as soon throw you overboard as not if they don't like your style. You ain't a shipwrecked hero. You're an unavoidable nuisance aboard this hooker. We've got other fish to fry."

The young man flushed angrily. He was pleasant-featured, fair-haired, of athletic build, his accent suggesting that he had imported it from England. He was conscious of his own importance in the world whose idols were money and social position. Grizzled old Johnny Kent, who had dined with fortune and looked death between the eyes on many seas, knew only one distinction between men. They were "good stuff" or they were "quitters." As for money, to have a dollar in one's pocket after a week ashore argued a prudence both stingy and unmanly. Wherefore he wholly failed to grasp the view-point of the young man who had been wrecked in a sea-going yacht.

Fortunately Captain O'Shea came back to divert the chief engineer's outspoken opinions. He called the castaway aside to say:

"Come to the galley with me and the cook will do his best for ye. I will sit down there and hear your yarn. If you want some clothes, maybe I can fit you out. My men are looking after your sailors."

"This is a filibustering expedition, I take it," exclaimed the other as they went forward.

"I do not admit it," judicially replied Captain O'Shea. "I will not turn state's evidence against meself."

When they had perched themselves upon stools at the galley table the young man handed the skipper his card, which read:

"Mr. Gerald Ten Eyck Van Steen."

The recipient eyed the card critically and commented:

"Dutch? I had a Dutchman as bos'n once and, saving your presence, he was an oakum-headed loafer. Now, how did ye come to be in these waters and whose yacht was it?"

Young Mr. Van Steen proceeded to explain.

"She was the *Morning Star*, owned by my father, the New York banker—the old house of Van Steen & Van Steen. You have heard of it, of course. He decided to take a winter holiday-trip and asked me to go along—that is to say, Miss Forbes and me. She is my fiancée——"

"You mean the young one. And she has signed on to marry you?" broke in Captain O'Shea with marked interest.

"Yes. She invited her aunt, Miss Hollister, to make the voyage as a sort of chaperon. We cruised to Barbadoes, where my father was called home on business and took a mail-steamer in a hurry. We jogged along in the *Morning Star* until her captain lost his bearings, or something of the kind, and you know the rest. We were ordered into a boat, but while waiting for an officer and more sailors a rain-squall came along—a nasty blow it was—and our boat broke loose, and we couldn't get back to the yacht. The wind was dead against us."

"The other boats will be picked up," observed O'Shea. "You were lucky to have such an easy time of it. Now comes the rub. What am I going to do with ye?"

"Chuck up your voyage," cheerfully answered Mr. Van Steen. "We simply can't go knocking about with you and risking the ladies' lives. And think of the hardships. My dear man, this tug is no place for a gentlewoman."

"It is not," agreed O'Shea, "nor was it meant to be. 'Tis not ladies' work I have on hand. I have promised to deliver my cargo at a certain place at a certain time, and there are men waitin' that need it bad. Shall I break me word to them?"

Van Steen made an impatient gesture. He was used to dealing with men who had their price.

"But you are in this business for money," cried he. "And I fancy you must have been pretty hard up to take such a job and run all these risks. Name your figure. I can understand the situation. Rescuing us is deucedly awkward for you. You don't know what to do with us. How much do you stand to make on the voyage, and what is the cargo worth?"

Captain Michael O'Shea leaned across the table and his fist was clenched. He did not strike, but the wrath that blazed in his eyes caused Van Steen to draw back. The sailor was not much older in years than the other man, but he had battered his way, not merely sauntered through life, and virile experiences had so strongly stamped his features

that Van Steen looked effeminate beside him. It was a masterful man that held himself steady under the provocation and replied to the insulting proposition slowly and carefully, as though choosing his words:

"You heard me say I had given me word to land this cargo as soon as ever I could, Mr. Van Steen. And on top of that ye try to buy me to leave good men in the lurch and break my word when this stuff of mine means life or death to them. All the money your daddy has in his bank could not make me put this ship one point off her course to set you ashore until I am good and ready. Do I make meself clear? You and your dirty money! This isn't New York."

Van Steen was honestly amazed. This lowering, flinty-faced young skipper must be crazy. Professional filibusters were a kind of criminal recruited from the roughest classes. They could have no morals, no manners, none of the sentiments of a gentleman. He ventured a final attempt and said with a nervous laugh:

"But what if I offer to buy the vessel outright, cargo and all, and absolutely protect you personally against any loss whatever?"

"I do not like your company," abruptly exclaimed O'Shea. "Ye fill me with sorrow for the rich. I cannot be rid of you, but we will not be on good terms."

His sense of humor saved the situation, and he concluded with one of his sunny, mischievous smiles:

"'Tis terrible inconvenient for both of us. Here we are, aboard a kind of a Flying Dutchman that must go dancin' and dodgin' about the high seas with every man's hand against her. And you are no more anxious to quit me than I am to see the last of you."

"But—but—it is absolutely impossible," stammered Van Steen. "Think of the ladies——"

"They have my room, and the bit of an upper deck will be sacred to them."

O'Shea stepped to the galley door, but Van Steen detained him with a question.

"What about me? Can I negotiate for a state-room?"

"Yes, indeed; it is on the overhang with two sacks of coal for a mattress, and ye should be thankful 'tis soft coal and not anthracite. Ye may find the suite a trifle crowded, but by kicking a few patriots in the ribs you can make room for yourself."

II

IN the refuge of the captain's room that distraught spinster, Miss Hollister, was overcome by emotions almost hysterical. Her first impressions of the *Fearless* had been in the nature of a nervous shock more severe than the episode of the shipwreck. Only the presence of her niece restrained her from tears and lamentations. Nora Forbes, the young person in question, was behaving with so much courage and

self-possession as to set her aunt a most excellent example.

"Oh, did you ever see anything so dreadful?" moaned Miss Hollister, glancing at the captain's shaving-glass and absently smoothing her gray hair. "There was a dead negro stretched on deck, and a white man all covered with blood, and the captain not in the least excited, actually joking about it——"

Miss Nora Forbes artfully coaxed her aunt away from the bit of mirror and proceeded to arrange her own disordered tresses as though this were more important than damp skirts and wave-soaked stockings. With hairpins twain between her pretty lips, she replied, and her accents were by no means hopeless:

"It is just too tremendously romantic for words, Aunt Katharine. I am not the least bit afraid. The captain may be a desperate villain, but he carries himself like a rough-and-ready gentleman. This is a genuine adventure, so cheer up and enjoy it."

"But the scenes of violence—the crew of cut-throats—the bloodshed," unsteadily resumed Miss Hollister, unable to refrain from dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. "I don't know what to say. My mind is a blank. I can only pray——"

"I should advise unpacking that bag and getting out some clean clothes," suggested Nora. "There is no reason why we should look like a pair of drowned frights. It is an upsetting experience, Aunt Katharine, but life on shore is so tame!"

"I shall be content to be tame forevermore, Nora,

if I am permitted to survive this experience. I hope Gerald can persuade the captain to land us at once."

"They didn't want to rescue us, so we must make ourselves as agreeable as possible. I intend to be particularly nice to the captain."

Miss Hollister was recalled to her duty as chaperon. Her manner was reproofing as she counselled:

"Be careful, Nora, you are a heedless girl at times and Gerald is very sensitive. Our plight is too serious for jesting. Of course you must be civil to the captain, but he is a perfectly impossible person. Gerald will reward him for his trouble in our behalf. We are placing ourselves under no obligations whatever."

They were quite trim and fresh in dry clothes when the cook brought up a tray laden with the best fare the ship's stores could provide and a pot of coffee black and hot enough to revive the most forlorn castaways that ever floated.

"Th' cap'n's compliments," said George, entering with a cake-walk shuffle, "an' he tells me to inform you that if th' grub is burnt or don't taste right he'll hang me up by mah thumbs an' peel off mah no-'count hide with a rope's end."

Miss Hollister appeared so ready to believe the worst that the rascally George could not forbear to add:

"Of cou'se, I'se jes' fillin' in till th' regular cook git3 well. Mebbe you seen him when you come aboard. He was all spraddled out. It mighty near done for big Jiminez, I'se a-tellin' you."

"What happened to him?" breathless'y demanded Miss Hollister, her hands clasped.

"He done fetch th' cap'n a cup of cold coffee, ma'am."

"How awful! And what was the matter with the white man in the khaki uniform?"

"He tried to say a good word for th' cook. And th' cap'n done give him *his*. This is a lively ship, ma'am."

He could not help grinning as he turned to leave, and Nora Forbes caught him in the act.

"You are an utterly shameless prevaricator," cried she, "and I have a notion to report you to the captain."

"No need of it," exclaimed O'Shea himself, who appeared in time to grasp the luckless George by the neck and pitch him down the stairway to the lower deck.

"He is a good cook, but his imagination is too strong for him at times," explained O'Shea as he stood in the door-way, declining Nora's invitation to enter. "The both of ye look as lovely as a May morning. It agrees with you to be shipwrecked."

Miss Hollister thawed a trifle, although she was strongly inclined to accept the cook's story as after the fact. But it was hard resisting the blarneying sailor with the merry eyes.

"Is such severity necessary? I feel that I ought to protest—" she began, spurred by the prompting of a New England conscience.

"And what was that slippery divil of a cook deludin' ye about?"

The spinster mustered courage to explain. Captain O'Shea roared with glee, and turning to Nora Forbes, as if recognizing a sympathetic listener, exclaimed:

"Would ye know the truth about the big nigger? Then I will introduce you to-morrow to the man that laid him out, and a better one never stood on two feet than this same Jack Gorham, the melancholy sharp-shooter who captures 'em alive with the butt of his gun."

Afraid of delaying their meal, he made an abrupt bow and vanished on deck. Presently Mr. Gerald Ten Eyck Van Steen stood gloomily regarding them. Nora made room for him on the cushioned locker and cheerily asked:

"How are you getting on with the assorted pirates? Are they a rum lot and do they sing 'Fifteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest'?"

"I am not getting on at all," sadly quoth he. "I have met only the chief engineer and the captain, and I should call them a very rum lot indeed. This is a floating mad-house. By Jove! I was never so angry in my life."

"I think I understand, Gerald," soothingly observed Miss Hollister. "But I am sure you can extricate us from this alarming situation. You are a young man of courage and resources and the name of Van Steen carries great weight everywhere."

"This wild Irishman never heard of it," said Gerald. "And when I talked money he almost crawled across the table to assault me."

"Then he refuses to put us on shore at once?"

tremulously cried the chaperon. "What do you mean, Gerald?"

"He doesn't care a hang about us. I made no impression on him at all. The more I argued the hotter he got. He intends to carry us about with him until he has dumped his cargo of guns somewhere on the Cuban coast. And then I presume he will make his way back to the United States, if the tug isn't sunk with all hands in the meantime."

"But the captain can't afford to let us interfere with his plans," protested Nora, who looked by no means so unhappy as the circumstances warranted. "Do be reasonable, Gerald. Aunt Katharine and I are quite comfortable."

"I am not," vehemently exclaimed young Mr. Van Steen. "The brute of a skipper tells me I must sleep on two sacks of coal. Fancy that!"

"I am afraid you were not tactful," was Nora's mirthful comment.

"We are in the captain's power," sighed Miss Hollister.

"We are kidnapped. That's what it amounts to," strenuously affirmed Van Steen.

Later in the afternoon the trio sought the railed space on the roof of the deck-house, just behind the small bridge which was Captain O'Shea's particular domain. The mate had found two battered wooden chairs and rigged an awning. Such consideration as this was bound to dull the edge of Miss Hollister's fears and she gazed about her with fluttering interest and reviving animation. Through an open

door they could see Captain O'Shea standing beside the man at the wheel. He wore no coat, his shirt-sleeves were rolled up and displayed his brown, sinewy forearms, and a shapeless straw hat was pulled over his eyes. His binoculars attentively swept the blue horizon ahead and abeam.

Presently he went on the bridge and searched the shimmering sea astern. His demeanor was not so uneasy as vigilant and preoccupied. So long did he stand in the one position with the glasses at his eyes that Gerald Van Steen became curious and tried to descry whatever it was that had attracted the captain's notice. At length he was able to make out a trailing wisp of brown vapor, like a bit of cloud, where sea and sky met.

"There is some kind of a steamer astern of us," said Van Steen to Nora Forbes. "Perhaps it is a German or English mail-boat. If so, I can see no objection to transferring us aboard."

Captain O'Shea overheard the remark and called to them:

"No mail-steamer is due on this course. And it is not a cargo tramp or she would not be steaming faster than we are."

"Then what can it be?" asked Nora.

"I cannot tell ye, Miss Forbes, nor am I anxious at all to let her come close enough to find out."

On the lower deck the Cubans were flocking to the overhang or climbing on the rail to gaze at the distant smoke astern. They talked excitedly, with many gestures. Evidently here was an event of

some importance. Little by little the other steamer cut down the miles of intervening space until her funnel was visible. The *Fearless* had been making no unusual effort to increase her own speed, but now Captain O'Shea said a few words into the engine-room speaking-tube, and Johnny Kent came trundling up from below, wiping his face with a bunch of waste.

The captain took him by the arm and imparted:

"I do not like the looks of her, Johnny; she is too fast to be healthy for us. I got the word in New York that two of the *Almirante* cruiser class were coming out from Spain to join the blockadin' fleet and make it hot for our business. There is nothing on the coast that can do over twelve knots, is there?"

"Only the *Julio Sanchez*, Cap'n Mike, and she's laid up at Havana with her boilers in awful shape. I suppose you want me to hook up and burn my good coal."

"I think this is a poor place to loaf in, Johnny. There was something said about a reward of fifty thousand dollars to the Spanish navy vessel that overhauled the *Fearless* and sunk her at sea. Better crack on steam and maybe we can lose that fellow yonder after nightfall."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n Mike, I'll put the clamps on the safety-valves, and take care not to look at the gauges. I'll need more help below."

"Grab the deck-hands. Get to it."

"And I was just crawlin' into my bunk to finish the most excitin' novel you ever read," mourned

Johnny Kent as he footed it down the ladder. "It's all about adventures. The situations are hair-raisin', Cap'n Mike."

Young Mr. Van Steen had edged within ear-shot so that he heard part of this dialogue. Returning to the ladies, he thrust his hands in his pockets and tried to hide his perturbation. Nora questioned him eagerly, and he answered with a shrug and a laugh:

"We're going to have a race with the steamer behind us. I imagine they told a few whoppers for my benefit. The chief engineer remarked in the most casual way that he intended to put clamps on the safety-valves. That is absurd, of course. The boilers might blow up."

"I am inclined to think he meant it," said Nora, who was looking at Captain O'Shea. "This is not a yachting cruise, Gerald."

"But if the silly old ass of an engineer really meant it, and we are pursued by a hostile man-of-war," stubbornly persisted Van Steen, "why did he talk about wanting to finish a novel because it was full of exciting adventures? Isn't this exciting enough?"

"You are stupid," impatiently exclaimed Nora. "These extraordinary men can't see that they are living the most thrilling adventures. It is all in the day's work with them. I am going to ask Captain O'Shea to tell me the truth."

Her aunt objected, but with no great spirit. Her poor, tired brain was bewildered by this new turn of events. She had begun to hope to survive the

voyage, but now she was beset by fresh alarms, fantastic and incredible. Imminent danger menaced the lawless tug. It could be felt in the buzzing excitement which pervaded the crowded decks. The only calm place was the bridge, where Captain O'Shea walked steadily to and fro, six paces to port and six paces to starboard, a ragged cigar between his teeth. Already the hull was vibrating to the increasing speed of the engines and the smoke gushed thick and black from the hot funnel.

Nora Forbes had mounted the bridge before Van Steen could make angry protest. Clinging to the canvas-screened rail, she paused to catch a bird's-eye glimpse of the swarming decks which spread beneath her from the sheering bow to the overhang that seemed level with the following seas. Captain O'Shea snatched a coat from the wheel-house and flung it over the girl's head and shoulders, for the red cinders were pelting down from the funnel-top like hail. For the life of him he could not keep the caressing note out of his pleasant voice when he was talking to a pretty woman.

"'Tis a bright day and a fine breeze, Miss Forbes, and the old *Fearless* is poundin' through it at thirteen knots. Are ye enjoying yourself?"

"Every minute of it," she replied, and the joy of living made her cheek glow. "Are you really afraid of that steamer behind us? Mr. Van Steen thought you were joking with the chief engineer. Really you can be frank with me. I promise not to make a scene."

He regarded her rather wistfully for an instant, felt unusually hesitant, and told her the truth because he could not bring himself to tell her anything else.

"If it is a Spanish cruiser yonder, as I mistrust, she may make short work of us. But she has to catch us first. And if I was easy to catch I would not be here at all. Sooner than risk a hair of your head, Miss Forbes, I would give up meself and my ship. But a man's duty comes first."

"You are not to give me—to give us, one thought," she warmly assured him, and her head was held high. "Thank you for being honest with me, Captain O'Shea. Do you wish us to stay on deck?"

Perplexed and unhappy, he answered:

"There is no safe place to stow you if the Spaniard gets within shooting range. The hold is full of cartridges and dynamite and such skittish truck."

The steamer astern was still slowly gaining on the *Fearless*. Her forward mast was now discernible, and the tiny ring around it was unmistakably a fighting-top. If the vessel belonged to any other navy than that of Spain, she would be jogging along at a cruising gait, instead of crowding in chase with a reckless consumption of coal. Captain O'Shea ran below to see how matters fared in the sooty, stifling kingdom of Johnny Kent. The *Fearless* could not turn and fight. All hopes of safety were bound up in those clanking, throbbing, shining engines, in the hissing boilers, in the gang of half-naked, grimy men who fed the raging furnaces and wielded

the glowing slice-bars and shifted the coal from the cavernous bunkers.

The quivering needles of the gauges already recorded more steam than the law allowed, and they were creeping higher pound by pound. The heat in the fire-room was so intense that the men had to be relieved at brief intervals. There was no forced ventilation, and the wind was following the ship. The deck-hands, unaccustomed to grilling alive, stood to it pluckily until they collapsed and were hauled out by the head and the heels. Back and forth, between the engine-room and this inferno, waddled Johnny Kent, raining perspiration, an oil-can in one hand, a heavy wrench in the other, and with the latter he smote such faint-hearted wights as would falter while there was strength in them.

"Hello, Cap'n Mike," he roared as the skipper sidled into the engine-room. "Is the other vessel still gainin' on us, and what does she look like?"

"She looks like trouble, Johnny. We are doing better. How are things with you?"

"I need a couple of husky men. No use sendin' me those limpsy patriots."

"I will look for them, Johnny. Will your boilers hold together? Can you get any more out of her?"

"Of course I can. She's licensed to carry a hundred and eighty pounds, and I aim to push her to two hundred and fifty."

Captain O'Shea hastened on deck, glanced forward and aft, and grinned as he caught sight of Gerald

Ten Eyck Van Steen. To this pampered young man he shouted:

"You are a well-built lad. Jump below, if you please, and the chief will introduce ye to a shovel."

"But I don't want a shovel. I refuse to go below." haughtily replied Van Steen. "It has occurred to me that if you will quit this silly race and let the other steamer come within signalling distance I can explain the case to her commander, and he will be glad to take us on board. Van Steen & Van Steen have influential banking connections with the Spanish government."

"'Tis no time to deliver orations," swiftly spake O'Shea. "The other steamer will shoot first and explain afterward. Come along and work your passage."

"Do not resist, Gerald," quavered Miss Hollister.

"Be a good sport and play the game," slangily advised Nora Forbes.

Captain O'Shea did not appear to use violence. He seemed to propel Van Steen with a careless wave of the arm, and the indignant young man moved rapidly in the direction of the stoke-hole ladder. Johnny Kent pounced on him with profane jubilation, instantly stripped him of coat and shirt, and shot him in to join the panting toilers. There was a plucky streak in this victim of circumstances, and he perceived that he must take his medicine. The fire-room gang was reinforced by a strong pair of arms, a stout back, and the stubborn endurance of the Dutch.

The afternoon was gone and the sun had slid under the lovely western sea. The Spanish cruiser was spurting desperately to overtake her quarry before darkness. The speed of the quivering, clangorous *Fearless* had crept up to a shade better than fifteen knots. The cruiser was in poor trim to show what she could do. Captain O'Shea knew the rated speed of every craft on the Spanish naval list and if his surmise was correct this particular cruiser should be doing eighteen knots. But he knew also that a foul bottom, slovenly discipline, and inferior coal counted against her, and that he had a fighting chance of escape.

It was immensely trying to watch and wait. Of all the company on deck that stood and stared at the small outline of the cruiser etched against the shining sea, only Captain O'Shea realized that this was the grimmest kind of a life-and-death tussle. He was your thoroughbred gambler who comprehends the odds and accepts them, but he was sorry for his crew, and much more so for the two women who were in his charge.

The chaperon had retired to her room in the grip of an acute nervous headache. She was mercifully unable to understand that tragedy moved on the face of the waters, that whether or not the *Fearless* was to be obliterated depended on a certain number of engine revolutions per minute.

The cook had prepared supper, observing to himself as he rattled his pans:

"If we all is due to git bumped to glory, I reckon

we'll take it more cheerful with a square meal under our briskets."

He dutifully bore a tray to the captain's room, but Miss Hollister had no appetite, and he betook himself to the bridge, where Nora Forbes was standing beside the captain.

"Set the supper on the chart-locker in the wheel-house, George," said O'Shea. "The young lady will not be wanting to go into her room and miss any of the show."

In her twenty years Nora Forbes had never lived as intensely as now. The blood of an adventurous ancestry was in her veins. She was thrilled, but not afraid. More than she was aware, the dominating personality of Captain O'Shea was influencing and attracting her. Unconsciously she was sharing his simple, clear-eyed courage, which accepted things as he found them. There was singular comfort in standing beside him. They lingered for a moment in the wheel-house, where the tall young mate gripped the spokes, his eyes fixed on the swaying compass-card in the binnacle.

"You have never filibustered before, I take it, Miss Forbes," said Captain O'Shea, "but ye are as cool as an old hand."

"I never dreamed that men were living such lives as this nowadays," she replied. "Tell me, do you——"

Down the wind came the report of a heavy gun. O'Shea leaped to the bridge and the girl followed, her heart throbbing with a sudden, sickening fear.

Twilight was shutting down. The first star gleamed in the pale sky, but a curious after-glow lingered to flood the sea with tremulous illumination. The cruiser showed like a gray shadow, a vague blur, from which shot a second flash of red. Again the boom of her gun was heard on the *Fearless*, and this time the steel shell kicked up a water-spout far off to starboard.

"Johnny Kent has lost distance in the last half hour," muttered the skipper. "His men can't stand the pace."

"What does it mean?" implored Nora, and she caught her breath with a sob. "Are they really and truly trying to kill us?"

"Those are the intentions, but the shooting is pretty bad, Miss Forbes. I will bet ye ten to one they do not hit us."

Unwittingly she moved closer to him. Her hand was upon the rail and he covered it with his hard palm. At the firm, warm contact her fortitude returned. His tremendous vitality was like an electric current. She smiled up at him gratefully, and he said in a big, friendly way, to put her at ease:

"'Tis good to have somebody to hang onto in a tight pinch, isn't it? Look! There he goes again! A better shot. It struck the water within two hundred yards of us. If he keeps on improvin' his target practice, I may lose me bet."

Nora was silent. She could think of nothing to say as she stared at the darkening horizon and the flashes of the cruiser's guns. The after-glow died,

and night marched swiftly across the tropic sea. It curtained the cruiser and obscured the *Fearless*. Johnny Kent had won in the first act of the drama.

Every light on board the tug was extinguished, and the word was carried below to close the draughts and slacken the fires in order to show no sparks from the funnel. The *Fearless* swerved sharply from her course and ran straight away from the Cuban coast, heading to the southward across the Caribbean. To follow her was a game of blind-man's-buff, and Captain O'Shea knew every trick of shaking off pursuit.

Nora had withdrawn her imprisoned hand with a self-conscious little start. Already the episode of the chase seemed unreal, theatrical. It would not have surprised her if the picturesque Cubans had burst into a light-opera chorus. She hastened to tell her aunt the good news, and presently there came staggering up from the lower deck the wreck of Gerald Ten Eyck Van Steen. The merciful night hid his grime and tatters. Leaning against the bulkhead of the tiny passageway, he addressed the invisible ladies in the state-room. His voice was husky and cracked, but, singularly enough, all its petulance had fled.

"It was simply great," he exclaimed. "We shovelled coal like drunken devils, and between-times they dragged us on deck and turned the hose on us. My word, it was a sporty game, and we won. I am bruised from head to foot, but what's the odds?"

Nora was instantly contrite. Here was an unexpected hero, whom she had shamefully forgotten.

"You poor Gerald! Tell us all about it."

He felt proud of himself. Nora shared the feeling, and yet her behavior lacked the warmth to be expected of a girl whose engagement to Gerald Van Steen had been a notable society event on Fifth Avenue. Wayward and shocking it was, no doubt, but she knew that she would rather talk to the rude and unregenerate Captain Michael O'Shea.

She let Gerald tell her of the great fight for more speed down among the roaring furnaces, of the fainting men, the straining boilers, the furiously driven engines, and of the bullying, cursing, jesting Johnny Kent who held the men and the machines unfalteringly to their work.

"He is an awful brute," said Van Steen, rubbing a welt on his shoulder, "but he has pluck—no end of it. A steam-pipe leading to a pump or something burst and scalded him, but he didn't let up at all, and threatened us with more kinds of death and damnation than ever."

"He must be suffering dreadfully," exclaimed the ardently sympathetic Nora. "I thought he looked so good-natured and jolly and easy-going."

"You are a poor hand at reading character," was the earnest comment. "Were you anxious about me, Nora?"

"Yes, I suppose so. It was so exciting on deck that I couldn't think of anything else but that wicked Spanish cruiser."

"Where were you all the time?"

"On the bridge with Captain O'Shea."

"The deuce you were! I don't like him at all, Nora. He is not the sort you should have anything to do with."

"I can't very well help meeting him now and then, Gerald. Don't be a goose. Tell me some more about your adventures with a shovel."

Van Steen was ruffled and became a sulky companion. Nora let him kiss her good-night, and he wearily descended to find a resting-place on the open deck. She found her aunt awake and told her of the heroic conduct of the scalded chief engineer. The stamp of Van Steen's approval was apt to color the mental attitude of Miss Hollister and she exclaimed in an animated manner:

"Does Gerald really believe that this Mr. Kent is such a fine character, a diamond in the rough?"

"Gerald certainly respects him, although he does not love him, Aunt Katharine."

"Then I hope to meet Mr. Kent in the morning, Nora. I am given to understand that he saved our lives, but I can't realize that the cruiser was actually shooting at us with deadly intent."

Miss Hollister was a woman of a certain kind of determination whenever duty was concerned. And because she had misjudged the chief engineer, it was her duty to make amends. After breakfast she asked Van Steen if she might safely go to the lower deck and look into the engine-room.

"You are coming on remarkably well," said he. "Aren't you afraid of the brutes?"

"I wish to thank our preserver and to inspect the ship," she calmly answered.

"Very well. Will you come along, Nora?"

"Thanks, Gerald, but Captain O'Shea wants to show me the chart of this coast and of the bay where he will try to land the cargo."

"Hang Captain O'Shea; he is making a confounded nuisance of himself," muttered Van Steen as he reluctantly departed with Miss Hollister. They passed among the lounging patriots and came upon their leader, Colonel Calvo, whom the flight from the cruiser had frightened, not out of his boots, but into them. As a cure for sea-sickness he had found the boom of an eight-inch gun extremely efficacious. He flourished his hat with flamboyant gallantry and bowed low as he addressed Miss Hollister.

"Ah, ha, Señora! To behol' you is a pleasure for me an' my braves' of soldiers. Yesterday we was ready to fight the ship of Spain, to defen' the ladies with our lives."

The dignified spinster looked confused. She resented the bold stare of the colonel's black eyes and the smirking smile. With a stiff little nod she grasped Gerald's arm and told him, as they moved to another part of the deck:

"I hate that man. Is he really a brave officer?"

"Not yet, but perhaps, Miss Hollister. We shall have to ask Johnny Kent about him."

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Pausing at the engine-room door, they found an assistant on duty. To their inquiry he replied:

"The chief is in his bunk, all bandaged up and using language. His arm and chest were blistered bad."

"I should like very much to do something for him," timidly answered Miss Hollister. "Who is attending him?"

"The Cuban doctor has a medicine chest, ma'am, and we all try to soothe him. But he cusses us out and throws things at us."

"I will look in his room and leave a message for you, Miss Hollister," said Gerald.

"He must be in great distress. And I am sure he is not getting proper care," she murmured.

Van Steen cautiously advanced to an open door beyond the engine-room, Miss Hollister hovering in the background. No sooner had the sufferer in the bunk caught sight of the young man than his big voice roared:

"Come to gloat, have you? I suppose you're glad to see me on my beam ends after the awful way I abused you. Get to hell out of here."

"Miss Hollister came below to express her sympathy," began Van Steen, ready to dodge a water-bottle that stood beside the bunk.

"Holy mackerel! The lovely lady with the gray hair?" blurted Johnny Kent, his face redder than ordinary. "Did she, honestly? Is she out there? Did she hear me slip that cuss-word?"

"I am afraid so. Do you want to apologize?"

She accepts my statement that you are a grand man in an emergency."

"Fetch her in. No, wait a minute. Straighten out the bedclothes and see that my nightie is buttoned clear up to the neck. This is the da-darnedest thing that ever happened to me."

It was also an unprecedented experience for Miss Katharine Hollister, but one could not live twenty-four hours on board the *Fearless* without losing one's grip on conventions, even though they were made in New England. She halted at the brass-bound threshold of the little room, and peered curiously at the recumbent figure of the chief engineer with his gray mustache and mop of grizzled hair.

"Come in and take the chair by my desk, ma'am. What on earth made you want to see me?" was his hearty greeting.

She remained standing, and confessed, hesitating nervously:

"I formed such a shocking opinion of you when I first saw you—I thought you had killed that negro—and when Mr. Van Steen told me how you had toiled and suffered to save the ship—and were in pain—I knew my judgment was mistaken—and that it was my duty——"

"Forget it, ma'am," and Johnny Kent waved a bandaged fist. "We ain't pretty to look at, and our manners are violent, but when you talk about duty, I guess you and I believe in the same gospel."

His gaze was so honestly, respectfully worshipful that Miss Hollister was conscious of an agreeable

sensation. She was a woman, and a charming one, but at fifty years she no longer dreamed of masculine homage.

"Were you severely injured, Mr. Kent?"

"Not half as much as those poor old boilers. I'm afraid to guess how many tubes are leaky. I'll quit sputterin' and losin' my temper when we get those Cubans and guns ashore."

"Their leader does not seem very capable," ventured Miss Hollister. "I was not at all favorably impressed with him when he spoke to me just now."

"Did that sea-sick tin soldier annoy you, ma'am?" heatedly ejaculated Johnny Kent as he raised himself on his elbow and fixed a glittering eye on a holster which hung on the wall. "I'll surge out of here and learn him a lesson that will do him a whole lot of good."

"No more violence, I beg of you," implored the spinster, dismayed and yet enjoyably thrilled. "I should not have mentioned it. If there is anything that can be done to make you more comfortable——"

"Pshaw, I'll be up and doing before we try to make a landing, ma'am. Your droppin' in to see me has made me chirk up. Blessed if it don't make this hole of a room seem kind of sweetened and lit up and sanctified."

Miss Hollister colored and concluded that she had stayed quite long enough. With a gracious word of farewell, she hastened to the upper deck. Nora Forbes had found a new companion, a lean, sandy man in faded khaki whose sad, freckled face had a

noticeable pallor and whose head was wound about with a white bandage. He sat with his back propped against a boat in the shade of the awning, and Nora announced to her aunt:

"I want you to know Mr. Jack Gorham. He is the man who conquered that giant of a negro. Captain O'Shea says it was one of the finest things he ever saw."

Gorham, a modest, shrinking soul, looked acutely uncomfortable and protested:

"I had to get him. He fetched me a couple of clips, but I feel pretty spry. I'll be ready to hop ashore and perforate them Spanish officers at a thousand per."

Oddly enough, Miss Hollister was no longer terrified by the presence of these men of war. Since meeting Johnny Kent she had suffered a sea-change. In the face of the veteran soldier she was able to read that same quality of respectful admiration. She had been vouchsafed a glimpse of the real spirit of this singular voyage. It was pure romance, reincarnated from the age when the world was young. She had been permitted to sail with men who were living an Odyssey, a saga, but they knew it not. She thought of Johnny Kent in his bunk, and now she looked at Jack Gorham, commonplace, unlettered, uncouth, and listened while Nora repeated the story of the fight with Jiminez. The soldier wriggled uneasily. His embarrassment was painful. When questioned he could only repeat:

"Well, I just had to get him. That's all there was to it."

"But you did not have to risk your life," persisted Nora. "Captain O'Shea was ready with his whole crew to overpower the man."

"The captain wanted to tackle him, but of course I couldn't stand for that," patiently explained Gorham.

"*Why* did you do it?" asked Miss Hollister.

"I guess it was what you might call a question of duty," he drawled.

"I have heard nothing else," was the spinster's wondering comment. "And yet you are all breaking the laws of your country. My standards of right and wrong seem all topsy-turvy."

"You sure did land in queer company this time," seriously affirmed Gorham.

Miss Hollister's excursion into the debatable ground of conduct and ethics as applied to buccaneering in the Caribbean was interrupted by Captain O'Shea, who was in a mood of brisk action and curt speech. Paying no attention to the ladies, he halted in front of Gorham to say:

"We shall try to put the stuff ashore to-night. Will ye be fit to land with the Cubans, or will I carry you back home with me?"

"Of course, I'll land, sir. The nigger didn't cut me deep," was the dogged response. "What's the programme?"

"The cargo will be hoisted out of the hold this afternoon, convenient for droppin' into the boats.

If you are able, will ye stand by to boss a gang of Cubans? Ye need not bear a hand yourself. Just talk to them and make signs with the butt end of that old Springfield."

"Yes, sir. I'll manage to keep them busy."

The news ran through the ship. By noon the patriots were seething with excitement. They were about to set foot on the beloved soil of Cuba, to be quit of the hateful, perfidious ocean. They became incredibly valiant. These forty men would face a Spanish army. They talked of marching to attack fortified cities. Magically revived, they scoured the rust from their weapons and brandished them with melodramatic gesticulation. They sang the battle-hymns of the revolution and wept at sight of the blue, misty mountain range of the distant coast. Jack Gorham regarded them critically.

One gang of Cubans went into the hold and another was stationed on deck. The heavy cases of rifles and cartridges were passed up through the hatchways and piled along the rail. Captain O'Shea sauntered hither and yon, once halting to remark in chiding accents:

"Better not bang those square boxes about so free and careless. 'Tis nitro-glycerine for making dynamite ashore."

"I'll land it myself," said Gorham. "It will come in handy for blowin' up Spanish troop-trains."

Toward nightfall the *Fearless* reduced speed and loafed along over a smooth sea at a distance of per-

haps thirty miles from the coast. The crisis of the voyage had come. O'Shea must run his ship into a trap and get her out again.

As soon as darkness was at hand the *Fearless* began the final dash for the coast. Johnny Kent had crawled from his bunk and wearily set himself down in the engine-room doorway to await orders.

"If anything goes wrong to-night, it'll happen all of a sudden," he grumbled to his first assistant. "Takin' chances of getting bottled up in a bay don't please me a mite."

"There is nothing in sight, chief. It looks like an easy landing. The skipper knows his business."

"But it would be just our fool luck to run into trouble with these two ladies aboard. Women complicate every game they draw cards in. But that Miss Hollister is certainly a queen, ain't she, Jim?"

"She's old enough to be my mother," ungallantly observed the youthful assistant.

"And I'm 'most old enough to be your granddaddy, you godless, disrespectful sculpin," was the angry retort of Johnny Kent. "And I'm man enough to break you in two across my knees."

The rash young man wisely held his tongue, and the chief engineer murmured to the world at large:

"Refinement and culture do make a heap of difference in folks. Now, if I had chased after refinement and culture when I was young, instead of incessantly pursuin' rum, riot, and rebellion on the high seas—but what's the use?"

Thereupon this pensive pirate turned to survey

his chanting engines and wondered what the night might bring forth. The *Fearless* maintained an even gait until the coast was no more than five miles distant. Then she drifted idly while Captain O'Shea swept the horizon with his night-glasses. His eyes and ears were acutely alert, but there was neither sight nor sound of Spanish blockading craft cruising to intercept him. Astern were piled six large flat-bottomed surf-boats, in nests, as fishermen's dories are carried. These were now launched and towed, ready to be ranged alongside and filled with cargo.

The forty Cubans conversed in hushed tones. Every man had knapsack, blanket-roll, canteen, and loaded rifle. The *Fearless* again picked up full speed and moved straight for the coast. Soon the mountains loomed like gigantic shadows blotting out the stars. It was a bold, sheer coast, indented here and there by small bays into which the rivers flowed from the passes and valleys. It was in a certain one of these bays that Captain O'Shea had been told by the Junta to beach his cargo. A force of Cubans led by General Maximo Gomez himself would be waiting to receive the munitions. As had been arranged, the *Fearless* now showed a white mast-head light above a red. Captain O'Shea looked at his watch. Three minutes later his signal-lights flashed again. In the gloom of the mountain-side, a white light winked above a red.

"That looks good to me," said O'Shea to the mate. "If there was anything wrong, the answering signal would warn us to keep clear. But I do

not like this messin' around in a bay. Give me the open coast and plenty of sea-room."

The *Fearless* had come so near the entrance of the bay that the shadowy headlands on either side were dimly discernible from the bridge. The speed of the tug diminished until she was cautiously moving ahead with no more than steerage-way.

The silence was intense. No one spoke above a whisper. The engines were turning over so slowly that their rhythmic clamor was no more than a faint, muffled throb, like the pulse-beat of the ship. Warily she slid into the quiet bay and made ready to drop anchor off a strip of white beach. The surf-boats were hauled alongside and the cargo began to tumble into them. It looked as though this game of filibustering might not be so hazardous as reputed. The seamen were in the boats, detailed to handle the oars and put the Cubans and the cargo ashore.

The deep-laden flotilla had not quit the *Fearless* for the first trip to the beach when the vigilant skipper fancied he saw a shadow steal from behind a headland at the mouth of the bay. For a long moment he ceased to breathe, while his gaze followed the illusive shadow which he was not sure that he could distinguish from the darkened sea.

Then one or two sparks gleamed like fire-flies and were gone. This was enough. Captain O'Shea instantly concluded that the sparks had dropped from a steamer's funnel. He was caught inside the bay. Perhaps the steamer would pass without sighting the *Fearless*. But the shadow halted midway be-

tween the headlands, and O'Shea cursed the treachery which he presumed had betrayed his destination. The snare had been cleverly set for him. The Cuban force in the mountains had failed to detect this Spanish vessel or they would not have signalled him that the coast was clear.

O'Shea had to make his choice. He could abandon his ship and flee with his crew and passengers to the beach and the jungle, or he could turn and try to smash his way out to sea. The thought of deserting the *Fearless* was so intolerable that he made his decision without hesitating. Summoning the mate and Johnny Kent, he spoke hurriedly.

"'Tis bottled up we are. Look yonder and ye can see for yourself. Call the men aboard and cut the boats adrift. Give it to her, Johnny, and hold on tight. There may be the divil and all of a bump."

"Goin' to run her down?" asked the chief engineer.

"If she doesn't get out of my way. 'Tis a small gun-boat most likely."

III

THE patriots were unable to adjust themselves to the sudden shift of events. One moment they were about to land, rejoicing and valorous, to be welcomed by the tattered legion of Maximo Gomez, and the next they were snatched away to surge hell-bent in the direction of the enemy and the detestable sea. Captain O'Shea might have delayed

to dump them into the boats and turn them adrift to flounder about the bay, but in all probability the Spanish gun-boat would overtake and slay many before they could reach the shore. He did not love them, but it was his duty to safeguard them along with the cargo.

Less than ten minutes after the shadow had moved across the entrance of the bay, the *Fearless* was swinging to point her nose seaward. As soon as the tug was fairly straightened out, O'Shea rang for full speed. It was no longer a silent ship. The patriots raised a lamentable outcry of grief and indignation, unable to comprehend this slip between the cup and the lip. They were unconvinced that the captain had really seen a gun-boat. They accused him of taking fright at phantoms.

Indeed, there was no such thing as slipping unperceived past the waiting enemy, for besides the loud protests of the Cubans, the engines of the *Fearless* made a strident song that re-echoed from the wooded shores. No longer in ambush, the Spanish craft turned on a search-light whose streaming radiance picked the tug out of the gloom like a lantern-slide projected on a screen. The two vessels were perhaps four hundred yards apart. Straight into the path of the search-light rushed the *Fearless*, veering neither to right nor left. Her tactics were disconcerting, her insane temerity wholly unexpected. It was obvious that unless the gun-boat very hastily moved out of the way there would occur an impressive collision. And the tall steel-shod prow of an

ocean-going tug is apt to shatter the thin plates of a light-draught, coastwise gun-boat.

Captain O'Shea himself held the wheel. The Spanish gunners hurriedly opened fire, but sensations of panic-smitten amazement spoiled their aim, and they might as well have been shooting at the moon.

"By Judas! ye are so gay with your search-light, I will just have a look at you," muttered O'Shea as he switched on the powerful light which was mounted upon the wheel-house roof. The handsome gun-boat was sharply revealed, her sailors grouped at the quick-fire pieces on the superstructure, the officers clustered forward. Jack Gorham's Springfield boomed like a small cannon, and a man with gold stripes on his sleeves toppled from his station and sprawled on the deck below.

The Cubans cheered and let fly a scattering, futile rifle fire, but the crew of the *Fearless*, convinced that they must fight for their skins, crouched behind the heavy bulwarks and handled their Mausers with methodical earnestness. The Spanish officers and seamen took to cover. They were not used to being shot at, and this filibustering tug was behaving like a full-fledged pirate. The commander of the gun-boat made up his mind to dodge collision and sink the *Fearless* with his guns before she should flee beyond range outside the bay. His mental machinery was not working swiftly, because this was what might be called his crowded hour. He tried to swing his vessel head on and to sheer to one side of the channel.

Captain O'Shea climbed the spokes of his steering-wheel and swung the *Fearless* to meet the manoeuvre. He was bent on crippling the gun-boat. With leaky boiler tubes, the tug was in no condition for another stern chase and the Spanish gunners would certainly hull her through and through and explode the cargo before he could run clear of the hostile search-light.

A few seconds later, the foaming bow of the *Fearless* struck the gun-boat a quartering, glancing blow that raked along her side. The Spanish commander had almost twisted his vessel out of the other's path and O'Shea dared not swing to catch her broadside on, for fear of running aground. The impact was terrific. The Spanish craft had a low freeboard and the guns of her main-deck battery protruded their long muzzles only a few feet above the water. The steel stem of the *Fearless*, moving with tremendous momentum, struck them one after the other, tore them from their mountings and stripped the starboard side clean. The tug's headway was checked and a tangle of splintered stuff held the two vessels interlocked. The Spanish gunners on the upper deck could not sufficiently depress the secondary battery to fire down into the *Fearless*, and on board the tug all hands had been knocked flat by the collision, so that for the moment there was no hostile action on either side.

So close together were the two steamers while they hung together that cases of cargo, toppling over, spilled through the crushed bulwark of the *Fearless*, and slid upon the gun-boat's lower deck

where the side had been fairly ripped out of her above the water-line. Then the tug very slowly forged ahead, tearing herself free and grinding against the gun-boat's cracked and twisted plates until the twain parted company.

"We are still afloat, glory be, and the engines are turnin' over," cried O'Shea.

He spun the wheel hard over to pass out to sea between the headlands, and steered where he thought deep water ought to be. The gun-boat had not opened fire, and he began to hope that he might win the freedom of the sea. Nor was the hostile vessel making any effort to follow him, and instead of blazing his trail with her search-light it had been turned skyward to flash signals for assistance against the clouds.

"I jolted the ambition out of her," joyfully exclaimed O'Shea. "I would not like to look at my poor old hooker, but she must be an awful hash on deck——"

The *Fearless* suddenly yawed to starboard and took the bit in her teeth. The skipper tried to fetch her back on her course, but she failed to respond to the wheel. He instantly knew that a rudder chain had parted. He yelled down the tube to Johnny Kent to reverse his engines. The masterless tug was heading out of the channel and the incoming tide caught her bow and swung her away from the seaward passage, over toward the nearest headland and its submerged reef.

The *Fearless* felt the powerful backward drag of

her screw, but not in time. The disabled steering-gear wrought the mischief before the emergency tiller could be manned or an anchor dropped to hold her in the channel. Her keel scraped along the coral bottom and the hull trembled to the shock of stranding. The *Fearless* was hard and fast aground and the tide lacked three hours of the flood.

Finding it useless to try to work her off, Captain O'Shea had the engines stopped. The plight was soon discovered by the gun-boat, which brought her search-light to bear on the tug. The Spanish commander laughed, no doubt, when he perceived that he could train his remaining guns and smash the *Fearless* to pieces at his leisure. It was point-blank range at a conspicuous target, and the tables had been turned.

Captain O'Shea comprehended the fate that was about to overtake his helpless ship. His boats had been cut adrift and there was no means of conveying his people to the shore. They could only swim for it and try to find footing on the reef.

"'Tis no use showing a white flag and offering to surrender," he said to himself while the sweat ran down his face. "We fired on them and we rammed their ship."

There was a life-raft on the deck-house roof, and he was about to order it shoved overside in order to send Nora Forbes and Miss Hollister ashore in charge of Van Steen and the mate. It was a forlorn hope, because the gun-boat would most likely fire at anything seen afloat. Just then Jack Gorham

climbed to the bridge and respectfully saluted the captain.

"We are up against it, Jack," said O'Shea. "The Spaniard yonder is taking his time. He will anchor bow and stern and then shoot us to splinters. I will be grateful if ye will lend the mate and young Van Steen a hand with the ladies. If ye can fetch the beach, take to the woods and try to find the camp of General Gomez."

"I have a proposition, sir," returned the soldier, and for once his voice was unsteady with excitement. "When we were tangled alongside the gun-boat, some cases of cargo was jolted off our deck onto her deck where the woodwork and plates was all tore away. For God's sake, put your search-light on her for a minute, quick, before she swings her smashed side away from us. She's still turnin'."

"And for what?" queried O'Shea, but he leaped for the lighting-switch, confident that the soldier knew what he was talking about.

"Two of them cases was nitro-glycerine, sir, and for a wonder they slid so easy that they didn't go off. I know them when I see 'em. Just give me one sight of them."

The search-light of the *Fearless* swept across the gun-boat, which was slowly shifting her position to find the middle of the channel and a safe anchorage. There was cramped room to manoeuvre, and she was swinging in a small arc which exposed for a little time the shattered side that had been rammed by the tug. A gaping hole above water disclosed the

main-deck forward, and the search-light of the *Fearless* played and flickered in and out, white and brilliant. It illuminated the wreckage and the heap of wooden cases which lay as they had slid across the fragments of bulwark that bridged the narrow gap between the interlocked vessels.

"Hold the light steady, sir," said Jack Gorham as he dropped to one knee, shoved the barrel of the Springfield across the rail of the bridge, and laid his cheek against the stock. "It seems plumb ridiculous, but it's worth tryin'."

His wonderfully keen eyes had distinguished a square wooden case which sat exposed and somewhat removed from the others on the gun-boat's littered deck. He had bragged of his marksmanship. Now was the supreme opportunity to make good. The gun-boat was moving. Her shattered side would be hidden from him before he could shoot more than twice or thrice.

As the sights of his beloved old rifle came true on the tiny target he pressed the trigger and the heavy bullet went singing on its way.

"Missed, by Godfrey!" grunted Gorham as he reloaded. "If I score a bull's-eye, you'll know it all right."

Annoyed by this impertinence, the gun-boat let drive with a one-pounder which put a shell through the funnel of the *Fearless* and showered the deck with soot. Gorham wiped his eyes and took aim for the second shot. Good luck and good marksmanship guided it. No need to wonder where this

bullet struck. The case of nitro-glycerine exploded with a prodigious detonation that seemed to shake earth and sea and sky. The forward part of the gun-boat was enveloped in a great sheet of flame. The people of the *Fearless* were stunned and deafened and the hull rocked violently against the reef. Burning fragments rained everywhere, and fell hissing into the bay. From the place where the gun-boat was rapidly sinking came cries for help.

"She is gone entirely. God help their poor souls," brokenly murmured Captain O'Shea.

He turned to shout to the mate:

"Pull yourself together and paddle over yonder with the life-raft. Pick up all ye find of the poor men in the water and set them ashore. The Cuban army will take care of them as prisoners of war. And maybe you can find some of our boats. 'Tis an awful sight to see a fine vessel snuffed out like a candle."

Jack Gorham sat on deck, his head in his hands, a disconsolate figure.

"I made a wonderful shot," he muttered, "but I hope I'll never have to make another one like it."

"Bridge, ahoy!" roared Johnny Kent from the lower deck. "This is war. We beat 'em to it. Now let's get this tug off the reef on the flood tide, if we rip the bottom out of her. This bay will be full of gun-boats and cruisers to-morrow."

Going below for the first time since the *Fearless* had entered the bay, the skipper found the decks in chaotic confusion. Broken bulwarks, smashed

doors and windows, parted funnel-stays, twisted deck-houses, and other signs of the collision were strewn from bow to stern. Some twenty of the patriots had dived overboard. Of those left on board, several had been hurt, and the crew of the *Fearless* were badly cut, bruised, and banged about.

O'Shea rallied all that were able to turn to, and set them to throwing cargo overboard. The guns and ammunition were packed in water-proof cases and could be fished up by the Cuban army at low tide. It was heavy material, and getting rid of two or three hundred tons of it must considerably lighten the stranded tug. At this back-breaking task doggedly labored Gerald Van Steen without waiting for an order. Captain O'Shea stared at him by the light of a lantern as though reminded of something important.

"The ladies!" cried he. "Are they safe and sound?"

"They are alive, thank you," said Van Steen. "I stowed them in their room, and made them lie on the floor with the mattresses tucked against the wall to stop the bullets. I could think of nothing else to do."

"And how did they take it?"

"Very well, indeed. Miss Hollister has been rather hysterical, but one can scarcely blame her."

"Well, the worst may be over, and again it may not," thoughtfully explained O'Shea. "Now, 'tis this way. I can set you people ashore, and ye can take a chance that the Cuban army will be able to

send you inside the Spanish lines under a flag of truce. But there may be weeks of hard living and fever and exposure before ye get anywhere at all. And it may be the death of the ladies. Or you can stay with me, if we get this vessel off, and I will carry you back to the United States."

"It isn't a hilarious proposition either way," replied Van Steen. "I rather think, though, that we had better stick to you."

The mate returned aboard with the tidings that more than half the crew of the gun-boat had been rescued by the life-raft and in boats which had drifted to the beach.

"We ought to have those boats in case we need them," said the skipper; "but if the ship can be worked off this tide, and is fit to go to sea, I will not wait for them or anything else."

The tide was rising fast and the company worked like mad to heave the cargo overboard. At length Johnny Kent set his engines going hard astern and the *Fearless* began to slide along her coral bed. Halting, bumping, grinding, she gradually moved into the deeper water of the channel and rolled in the swell that ran past the headlands. Collision and stranding had fearfully racked and strained her hull, and the captain was not surprised when Johnny Kent bellowed from below:

"We're leakin', of course. I guess every rivet in her must have pulled loose. You'd better pray for a spell of good weather."

"Would ye rather be shot or drowned decent in

a gale of wind, Johnny? 'Tis suicide to stay on this coast till daylight."

The forlorn tug limped out to sea at her best speed, which was not much. The fire-room gang was more or less disabled and the engines needed a deal of tinkering. Drop an able-bodied man from a third-story window and he may not break his neck, but his gait is not apt to be brisk.

"By the holy poker!" ejaculated O'Shea to the mate as they watched the shadowy mountains drop astern. "We delivered the cargo, though it is in a few feet of water, but I have some patriots left. I could think of only one thing at a time. What will I do with them?"

"You can search me, sir. Dump 'em ashore at Key West, if we ever get that far."

"I will not run into this coast again with a leaky old crab of a ship and no more than coal enough to carry me to a friendly port."

Men must sleep, and when the *Fearless* had left the coast twenty miles behind her Captain O'Shea set the regular watches and curled up on the wheel-house transom for a nap before daylight. Johnny Kent, after a sorrowful survey of his engines and boilers, crawled into his bunk and presently his snores rose and fell with the cadenced beat of the steam-pump that fought to keep the water from rising in the leaky hold. The sea was smooth, the clouds no longer obscured the stars, and the weary crew was suffered to rest before clearing away the wreckage and patching the broken upper works.

When O'Shea awoke the dawn was bright and a fresh breeze whipped across an empty sea. George, the cook, greeted him with melancholy demeanor.

"You-all suttinly did play th' mischief with mah galley when you kerbumped that gun-boat, cap'n. Every las' dish is busted."

"Where were you, George?"

"Hidin' behind th' range, please, suh. An' when that there Spaniard blew up it broke all th' galley windows an' filled me plumb full of glass. Ain't we had mos' excitement enough?"

"I hope so. Did your friend, big Jiminez, swim ashore last night?"

"No, suh. He's in th' galley helpin' me straighten things out. Him an' me ain't a mite hostile. Mistah Gorham suttinly did knock a heap o' sense into that niggah's skull."

The breeze blew with steadily increasing weight and began to kick up a choppy sea which racked the sluggish, laboring tug. Johnny Kent reported that the pump was not keeping the water down as easily as during the night. O'Shea chewed over this disquieting news and was undecided whether to attempt the long passage around Cape San Antonio into the Gulf of Mexico. The alternative was to run for Jamaica and take refuge in the nearest neutral port. The English government would probably seize his ship, but her company would be safe against arrest and condemnation as pirates by the Spanish authorities.

While he was considering this grave problem his

eyes were gladdened by the sight of Nora Forbes, who came on deck and halted to gaze with amazement at the wrecked appearance of the vessel. Her splendid color paled and she smiled rather tremulously at Captain O'Shea, who reassured her:

"We are still afloat, but we look like a junk heap. And how did ye pull through? And is your aunt getting the upper hand of that nervous prostration?"

"Miss Hollister was terribly frightened, and—and—so was I. I would rather not hear about all that happened last night—not just yet."

"And I would rather not think of it, just now, Miss Forbes. Perhaps I ought to have set ye ashore among the Cubans. I hope you will not be worse off at sea again."

"I am glad to be at sea again, with you, Captain O'Shea," said Nora, and she looked him in the eyes like a true viking's daughter who scorned subterfuge and spoke as her heart moved her.

It was perhaps as well that Gerald Van Steen decided to join them just then.

"And are ye convinced that the Spanish are not a courteous people when ye meet them by night?" O'Shea cheerfully asked him.

"Do you know, I begin to like this filibustering," answered the industrious young man, who looked as trampish as any of the crew. "One feels so well pleased after he has pulled out of one of these scrapes that it is almost worth while running into it." He turned to Nora and addressed her with a shade of

appeal in his voice: "Will you sit down with me for a while? I have no end of things to talk about."

"Why, certainly, Gerald. Good-by, Captain O'Shea. The top o' the morning to ye."

The captain bowed and raised his straw hat. His ingenuous countenance wore a somewhat puzzled expression, as if he beheld a new complication in this tumultuous voyage of his.

It was well into the forenoon before Johnny Kent found a breathing-spell and climbed above to confer with the skipper. The indomitable engineer appeared aged and haggard. The pain of his burns distressed him and he was spent with worry and weariness. His hands trembled as he pulled himself up the bridge stairway.

"I ain't as young as I was, Cap'n Mike," he huskily exclaimed. "Blamed if I don't feel kind of strained and shook up, same as the poor old *Fearless*. Looks like one of them fair-weather gales, don't it? Bright sky and a big sea and wind to peel your whiskers off before night."

"'Tis a good guess," soberly replied O'Shea. "Can we weather it, Johnny?"

"I don't want to make the ladies nervous and fretty," confided the chief, "but we ain't keepin' the water down, Cap'n Mike. It will be in the fire-room before dark at this rate——"

"And then she will fall off into the trough of the sea and founder," said O'Shea. "And we have no boats. Will your men stay on duty and keep her going?"

"They will, Cap'n Mike. The big nigger feels spry enough to turn to, and the gang is scared to death of him. They believe he'll murder 'em if they quit on me."

"Well, Johnny, make steam as long as ye can, and if the weather will not moderate I can try to fetch up somewhere before she goes to the bottom."

"I ain't particularly anxious, Cap'n Mike. I never saw you in a hole you couldn't work your way out of. Of course, there's the ladies. How are they, anyhow? The young one is on deck, lookin' like a morning-glory. But what about Miss Hollister? She ain't sick, is she?"

"Van Steen says the flurry last night gave her a sort of nervous prostration," answered O'Shea. "She is up and dressed now and taking it easy in her room. Maybe ye would like to duck in and hand her a few kind words."

"I sure would," and Johnny Kent beamed. "Ladies like her are mighty refined and delicate and sensitive, and they're liable to be took with this nervous prostration. I don't blame her a bit, Cap'n Mike. Why, when we piled up on that reef and the gunboat was fixin' to shoot us all to hell-and-gone, I felt nervous myself. Honest I did."

"Go to it, Johnny, but don't mention the fact that we are due to founder as the next act of this continuous performance."

It was really extraordinary to see how much animation came into the face of Miss Hollister when Johnny Kent poked his gray head inside the open

door and grinned a bashful greeting. Never did a hero wear a more unromantic aspect, but the spinster had selected him as her own particular hero, nevertheless. He was rugged, elemental, as she had come to regard him, and, in fact, there was something uncommonly attractive to the discerning eye in the modest courage, inflexible devotion to duty, and simple kindness of this grizzled old sea rover.

"I'm ashamed that we had to give you such a scare last night, ma'am," he began. "It's a hoodooed voyage, any way you look at it. Why, Cap'n Mike and me ran a cargo into Hayti last summer and you would have enjoyed it. Stuff on the beach in three hours and a funny old stone fort bangin' away at us just enough to keep all hands amused."

"But after this experience, you will not dream of going filibustering again, will you?" Miss Hollister asked him.

Johnny Kent tugged at his gray mustache and looked rather blank as he ejaculated:

"Why not? I ain't fit for anything else. Of course, I get big wages for runnin' these risks, and if I can ever save some money, I'm hopin' to buy a farm down in Maine and raise chickens and such truck. That's what I call really excitin' and romantic."

Miss Hollister responded eagerly:

"And a vegetable garden and cows, and——"

"Yes, ma'am. And flowers in the front yard—hollyhocks, and asters, and peonies, and a lilac bush

by the front door-step. I set and think about it a lot."

It did not appeal to the chief engineer as at all incongruous that the conversation should have taken this turn while the ship was slowly sinking beneath them.

"I have been very successful with flowers," brightly returned Miss Hollister. "I shall be delighted to send you some seeds and cuttings whenever you return to New England to live on that wonderful farm of yours."

"Thank you. Now when it comes to chickens, for all-round service there ain't a bird to beat the Plymouth Rock. I subscribe to the *Poultry Journal*, and always bring it to sea to read——"

The mate dodged out of the wheel-house to shout: "You're wanted below, chief. The assistant sends up word that the loose coal is sucking into the pump and she's chokin' up."

"Don't worry, ma'am," gently spoke Johnny Kent as he ceremoniously shook Miss Hollister's hand. "Engines and pumps are provokin' critturs and they're always getting out of kilter."

He paused outside to ask Captain O'Shea:

"What's the answer? Do we win or lose? There's bad news from below. The bunker coal is awash. The pump is liable to quit on me 'most any time."

"I have overhauled the charts, Johnny, and there is a bit of a coral key marked down thirty miles from our present position, bearing sou'-sou'west. I have changed me course to head for it."

"Thirty miles! Five hours or more at the speed we're makin'. It will be a close finish, Cap'n Mike."

"Life seems to be a game of close finishes for you and me, Johnny."

The *Fearless* wallowed sluggishly over a rolling, foamy, blue sea. Already the water in the holds had diminished her natural buoyancy. The waves leaped through her broken bulwarks and flung themselves across the deck. The crew and the remaining Cubans had a listless, discouraged demeanor. Their energy was deadened by misfortune. The voyage was ill-fated. Jack Gorham, by contrast, undertook whatever duty came handiest with a kind of machine-like, routine fidelity, unhurried, efficient, his melancholy countenance reflecting neither fear nor impatience. Now and then Jiminez emerged from the stoke-hole to sluice his huge body with pails of salt water. At such times Gorham crossed the deck to slap the negro on his bare back and speak words of approval in broken Spanish. The responsive grin of Jiminez showed every big, white tooth in his head. He had found a master whom he vastly respected, and there was no ill-will between them.

Long before the thirty miles had been run down Captain O'Shea was searching the sea with his glasses to find the tiny coral islet where he hoped to find refuge. It was out of the track of steamer traffic, and so far from the Cuban coast that the danger of discovery by the Spanish navy seemed fairly remote. The chart failed to indicate any harbor, but O'Shea had no expectation of saving his ship. He would

drive her ashore and try to put his people on the beach.

At length he was able to descry a low, sandy strip almost level with the sea, along which the breakers flashed white and green. It was the key, and as the *Fearless* moved nearer it was seen that the vegetation comprised only a few ragged bushes. Desolate, sun-baked, and wind-swept was the place, but it was dry land, and better than the deep sea in a foundering ship.

Captain O'Shea laid down his glasses and called Van Steen.

"'Tis not what I expected, but the *Fearless* is done for," said he. "We have fresh water and stores to last some time. And I have faith enough in me luck to feel sure we will be picked off that bit of a key yonder. Please ask the ladies to pack their traps, and you will put life-belts around them."

As the *Fearless* lurched drunkenly toward the beach, it seemed as though every comber would stamp her under. The water in the hold had covered the fire-room floor, and was hissing and swashing under the furnaces. The deck-hands were strung along the ladder and hatch, bailing with buckets to aid the choking, sputtering steam-pump.

"I ain't got any business to be drowned in this lump of a tug," said Johnny Kent to the first assistant. "I'm thinkin' about that farm with the holly-hocks and Plymouth Rocks."

"If that pump stops, which it has symptoms of

doing, you'd better be thinking of your wicked old soul," growled the assistant.

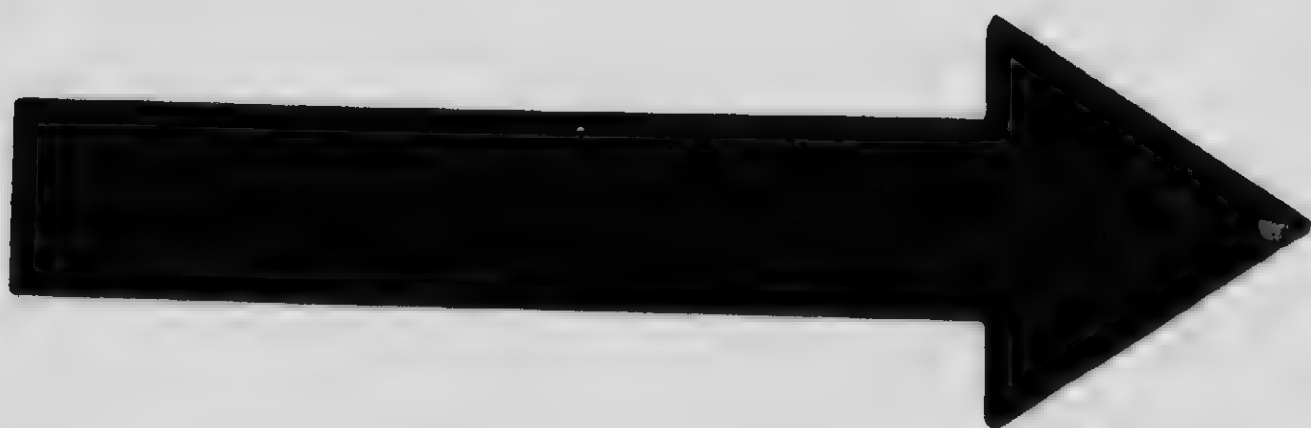
"I can't swim a lick," muttered the chief engineer.

"You'd better learn quick. There go the fires," yelled the other as clouds of steam poured out of the engine-room, and the men below came up the ladder, fighting, scrambling, swearing. Johnny Kent dodged the wild rush, glanced out to sea, and shouted, "Breakers ahead! There are a few more kicks in the old packet and she'll hit the beach yet."

As the steam pressure rapidly ran down, the dying engines turned over more and more feebly, but the propeller continued to push the vessel very languidly into the shoal water. Presently she ceased to move, there was a slight jar, and she heeled to starboard. The doomed tug rested upon a sandy bottom.

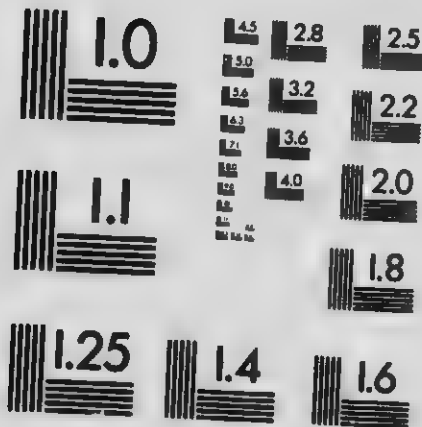
Now that she was inert, aground, lifting no more to the heave and swing of the seas, the breakers shook her with an incessant bombardment. Spray flew over the bridge and pelted into the cabin windows. The key was about three hundred yards distant from the tug. Between her and the dry land was a strip of deeper water than the shoal on which she had stranded, and then the wide barrier of surf where the breakers tossed and tumbled in a thundering tumult.

Captain O'Shea scanned the angry water and wondered how he could send his people through it. The clumsy life-raft was all he had to put them on. It was buoyant enough, but unmanageable in such



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boisterous weather as this, and would most likely be blown out to sea and miss the key entirely. To remain on board and hope for quieter weather on the morrow was to risk pounding to pieces overnight.

Then O'Shea caught sight of the jagged timbers of an ancient wreck half covered by the sand on the ridge of the key. If a line could be carried from the ship and made fast to one of those stout timbers, the life-raft might be hauled through the surf.

"'Tis a terrible swim to undertake," he painfully reflected. "I will try it meself, but if I go under there is nobody to take charge of these people. My men are a rough lot, and it will be hard living on this God-forsaken bit of a key."

As if Jack Gorham had read what was in the skipper's mind, he crawled across the sloping deck and shouted something in the ear of Jiminez. The negro nodded and waved an arm in the direction of the beach. The soldier was urging and explaining, the other eagerly assenting. Gorham shouted to the bridge:

"This fine big nigger of mine will carry a rope ashore. He can swim like a duck, and there's nobody aboard with half his strength."

"Aye, aye, Jack!" exclaimed O'Shea. "I will give him a heaving-line, and when he hits the beach he can haul a light hawser ashore and make it fast."

Jiminez had no need to strip for active service, clad as he was only in tattered dungaree breeches chopped off above the knees. It was apparent that he proposed risking his life because the soldier had

asked it of him. For the lives of the others he cared not a snap of his finger. Knotting an end of the heaving-line around his waist, he poised himself upon the guard-rail, a herculean statue of ebony. Gorham grasped his hand and said in farewell:

"You keep on going, Jiminez, old boy, or I'll cave in your cocoanut with the butt of my Springfield."

The negro grinned and shot downward into the foaming sea. His round head and gleaming shoulders emerged for an instant and then he dived again to pass under the toppling crest of a breaker. A few overhand strokes, and he was in the deeper water with a hundred yards of comparatively easy swimming. He ploughed through it with tremendous ease and power while Captain O'Shea paid out the heaving-line in his wake. Turning on his back, Jiminez rested before the final struggle with the surf on the beach.

The people on the *Fearless* forgot their forlorn situation. They were absorbed in the picture of the bright, hot sand, the dazzling wall of surf, with the gulls dipping and screaming overhead, and the tossing figure of the black swimmer. Jiminez vanished in the outer line of breakers, bobbed into view for an instant, and was whirled over and over. The undertow caught him and pulled him down, but he fought clear and came to the surface, now beaten seaward, now gaining a yard or so.

From the tug it looked as though he were being battered about like a piece of drifting wreckage, but the sea could not drown him. More than once the

beholders were sure he had been conquered. Then they shouted as they saw him shoot landward on the crested back of a rearing comber. He felt the sand with his feet. He was knocked down and rolled back, but regained a foothold and resisted the drag of the out-rushing waves. Wading powerfully, he stumbled into shallow water and fell on his knees, too exhausted to walk, and crawled on all fours to the dry sand. There he sprawled on his back like a dead man, while the hearts of those on board the *Fearless* beat slow and heavy with suspense. A little while and Jiminez staggered to his feet, shook himself like a dog, and made for the timbers of the old wreck. Making the end of the heaving-line fast, he threw his arms over his head as a signal.

Captain O'Shea bent to the other end of the line the strong rope which he had used for towing the surf-boats. Jiminez sat himself down, dug his heels in the sand, and began to haul in like a human capstan. The rope trailed slowly through the surf without mishap, and the negro firmly belayed it to one of the embedded timbers. Having accomplished what he had set out to do, Jiminez sensibly rolled over, pillowed his head on his arm, and let the other men rescue themselves.

The life-raft was now shoved overboard and secured to the swaying rope by means of pulley blocks. Four picked men and the mate were detailed to make the first trip, which was in the nature of an experiment. They paddled the life-raft across the

strip of quieter water, the pulleys holding them close to the fastened hawser. When the raft reached the surf, they laid hold of the hawser and lustily hauled their careering craft shoreward, hand over hand. Drenched and breathless, they gained the beach and sought a few minutes' rest before undertaking the return journey.

As soon as the raft had safely come back to the *Fearless* Captain O'Shea shouted:

"Now for the ladies! 'Tis time they quit the poor old hooker."

Nora Forbes was waiting, a lithe round arm about Miss Hollister's waist. The spinster was white to the lips, and her eyes sought, not the protecting care of Gerald Van Steen, but the bracing presence of that stout-hearted old pirate Johnny Kent, who was profanely wrestling with the fresh-water barrels.

"You will get wet, ladies," said O'Shea, "but 'tis not at all dangerous. The raft will take you through the surf like a toboggan. Mr. Van Steen will go with you. Ye are a brave pair, and I would ask no better shipmates."

The raft was pitching and bucking alongside, but the lower deck of the vessel was now level with the sea. O'Shea caught Miss Hollister in his arms, waded to the rail with her and waited until Van Steen and the other men were ready to catch her. Then with a wrenching heave, O'Shea tossed her into their outstretched arms. It was Nora Forbes's turn to leave the vessel.

"You will pardon the liberty," O'Shea whispered

in her ear, "but this is no small consolation for losing me ship."

He swung her clear of the deck and her arms, perforce, had to cling around his neck while he balanced himself with sailorly agility and waited for the tug to right itself and the raft to rise on the next wave. Perhaps he held her a moment longer than was necessary. Captain Michael O'Shea was a man with a warm heart and red blood in him. Deftly and carefully he swung her over the rail, and the men on the raft placed her beside Miss Hollister. Nora waved her hand in a blithe farewell. Miss Hollister had closed her eyes, but she opened them quickly enough when Johnny Kent came rolling aft to flourish his cap and shout:

"Sorry I can't make the passage with you. We'll have lots of time to talk flowers and hens on that patch of sand, but it looks like mighty poor soil for gardenin', ma'am."

Guided by the pulley-blocks that creaked along the hawser, the raft made the tempestuous passage through the surf. The shipwrecked ladies set themselves down on a sandy hummock in the hot sunshine. They were waterlogged and appeared quite calm and collected because they lacked strength for anything else.

The raft plied to and fro in a race against time. Such stores as would be damaged by wetting were wrapped in tarpaulins. The precious water-barrels were filled from the ship's tank, and the wise Johnny Kent packed spare copper piping, a gasolene torch,

empty tin cases, and tools for making a condenser to distil salt water. Captain O'Shea took care to send all the arms which had been served out to the crew, besides several boxes of rifles and ammunition that had been overlooked in dumping the cargo. Also he saved a number of shovels and picks designed for use as intrenching tools.

Before the last load of stuff had been hauled to the beach, the *Fearless* was driven so far on the shoal that she began to break amidships. O'Shea ordered Colonel Calvo and his Cubans off the vessel, and then sent his crew ashore. He was left on board with Johnny Kent, Jack Gorham, and the men needed to help manage the life-raft. The little group stood in the lee of the deck-house. The tragedy of the ship oppressed them. They were mourners at the funeral of a faithful friend. Sentimental Johnny Kent exclaimed with a husky note in his voice:

"The *Fearless* did her best for us, Cap'n Mike. It's a rotten finish for a respectable, God-fearin' tow-boat."

"She was a good little vessel, Johnny," softly quoth O'Shea. "But those guns we dumped in the bay will come in mighty useful to old Maximo Gomez, and maybe the voyage is worth while after all."

"I seem to be sort of side-tracked, but I ain't complainin'," murmured Jack Gorham. "I hope the Cubans will keep the rebellion moving along until I can get to 'em and help mix it up."

One by one they jumped to the raft and Captain O'Shea was the last man to leave. With a shake of the head he turned to gaze no more at the *Fearless*, but at the disconsolate cluster of men on the key, who were waiting for him to take command.

IV

WITH ready resource and dynamic energy, O'Shea proceeded to organize the refugees. The dreary little sand-bank was no longer populated by discouraged loafers, but by busy, shouting toilers who made a camp with the cheerful zest of children at play. There were tarpaulins, storm-sails, and awnings to fashion shelters from the sun and rain. The beach was strewn with an accumulation of drift-wood which served to cut into uprights and cross-pieces that were lashed together with bits of line. In this wise a tent was built for the two women. It was set apart from the other camps with an ingenious amount of comfort and privacy.

The crew of the *Fearless* flocked together, while Colonel Calvo and his Cubans established themselves in quarters of their own. All this was a two days' task, at the end of which the shipwrecked company, utterly fagged, slept and rested most earnestly and took no thought of the morrow. The blessed respite from excitements and alarms lulled them like an anodyne.

When, at length, the camp came out of its trance, Captain O'Shea discovered that his work was cut

out for him to devise a daily routine which should maintain obedience, discipline, and good-nature. His own men were accustomed to an active life, their energy was exuberant, and when not fighting the sea they enjoyed fighting among themselves. On shipboard they obeyed by instinct because it was the iron tradition of their calling, but on the key these bonds were inevitably loosened.

While this was to be expected, the behavior of the surviving patriots was nothing short of phenomenal. They were rid of the curse of the sea which had wilted them body and soul. The immovable land was under their feet. They laughed and displayed an astonishing vivacity. They strutted importantly, soldiers unafraid. Even Colonel Calvo was reanimated. His sword clanked at his side. Large silver spurs clashed on the heels of his boots and he perceived nothing absurd in wearing them. His attitude toward Captain O'Shea was haughty, even distant. It was apparent that this miraculously revived warrior considered himself the ranking officer of the island. He signified that he would take entire charge of matters in his own camp.

O'Shea was surprised. At sea the patriots had been so much bothersome, unlovely freight.

"'Tis comical," he said to himself. "I took it for granted that I was the boss of the whole outfit."

Common-sense and experience told Captain O'Shea that he must keep all hands busy, if he had to invent work for them. He therefore staked out a

rectangular space of considerable extent and set them to throwing up sand to form four walls several feet thick within which the company might find shelter. It was a simple pattern of earthworks, but more efficient to resist bullet and shell than stone or concrete.

"We may not need to scuttle into it," he explained to Jack Gorham, "but if one of those Spanish blockadin' craft should accidentally cruise off shore, we will be in shape to stand her off. Anyhow, it will keep our tarriers occupied for a while."

"How do you frame it up that we're goin' to get away from this gob of sand?" asked the chief engineer. "Not that I'm fretty, Cap'n Mike, or findin' fault, but I've seen places that I liked better."

"We will mark time a little longer, Johnny, and then if a schooner or steamer doesn't happen by, I will rig a sail on the life-raft, and send it to the south'ard. How are the ladies to-day? I have had no time to pay a social call."

"Miss Hollister don't seem as droopin' as she was. I dried out a pack of cards that was in my jumper, and we played some whist. If you want to set in, Cap'n Mike, I'll drop out. I ain't really graceful and easy in a game where there's more than five cards dealt to a hand."

"Thank you, but I am handicapped in the same way, Johnny. I will stroll over and pay me respects before supper."

"Miss Forbes seemed a mite peevish that you

haven't made more tracks toward their tent," observed the engineer.

"Pshaw, they are glad to have the chance to be by themselves."

Nevertheless, Captain O'Shea appeared interested when he spied Miss Forbes sauntering alone on the beach, and at some distance from her tent.

"Miss Hollister is asleep and Mr. Van Steen is trying to mend his shoes with a piece of wire," said Nora. "And I have done my week's washing like an industrious girl, and now I'm looking for someone to play with."

"Would you like to walk to the far end of the key, Miss Forbes? And then, perhaps, ye would care to inspect the camps. We have a ship-shape little settlement, if I do say it meself."

"An exploring expedition? I shall be delighted," cried she, unconsciously glancing at the tent which hid the chaperon and also Gerald Van Steen.

They strolled a little way without speaking. O'Shea halted to gaze at the wreck of the *Fearless*. With quick sympathy, the girl understood and made no comment. He turned away with a sorrowful smile and broke the silence.

"'Tis strange how close a man's ship is to his heart. I wish I did not have to see her."

"There will be other ships for a man like you, Captain O'Shea," said Nora.

"But never a voyage like this one, Miss Forbes."

"I was thinking the same thought. For me there will never be a voyage like this, Captain O'Shea."

"For misfortune and bedevilment generally, do ye mean?" he asked rather hastily.

"No, I do not mean that," and she spoke in a low voice as if talking to herself. "I have enjoyed it. I suppose I am very queer and shocking, but I shall look back to this experience all my life and be glad that it came to me."

The shipmaster wondered how much she meant. Her intonations told him that it was something personal and intimate. Perhaps other women had made love to Captain Michael O'Shea, but never one like Nora Forbes. Amid circumstances so strange and exotic, so utterly removed from the normal scheme of things, it was as natural as breathing that speech should be sincere and emotions genuine.

O'Shea had a curiously delicate sense of honor. He could not forget Gerald Van Steen. Nora had promised to marry him. Steering the conversation away from dangerous ground, he said:

"I have changed me opinion of Mr. Van Steen. He has behaved very well. He did not understand us at first."

Nora was not as interested as before, and replied rather carelessly:

"He has worked hard because you and Mr. Kent compelled him to."

"You are not fair to him," warmly returned O'Shea. "There is not a man in the crew that has stood up to it any better. Nor am I warped in his favor, for I will own up that he rubbed me the wrong way at first."

"Of course, I have admired the way he handled himself on board the *Fearless*," admitted Nora, her conscience uneasy that she should be so laggard a champion. "But I hardly expected to hear you sing his praises, Captain O'Shea."

"Why not? I would give me dearest enemy his deserts"—he hesitated and bluntly added—"and then if he got in my way I would do me best to wipe him off the map."

"If he got in your way?" murmured Nora. "I should hate to be the man that stood in your way."

"If there is to be straight talk between us," demanded O'Shea, "tell me why ye show no more pleasure that this voyage has knocked the foolishness out of Van Steen and made a two-fisted man of him? When he came aboard he was an imitation man that had been spoiled by his money. He is different now. Can ye not see it for yourself?"

"Yes, I see it," replied Nora, regarding O'Shea with a demeanor oddly perplexed. He was not playing the game to her liking. The interview had been twisted to lead her into a blind alley. With a petulant exclamation, she walked briskly toward the farther end of the key. O'Shea followed, admiring, cogitating.

Overtaking her, he indicated a broken topmast washed ashore from some tall sailing-ship, and they found seats upon it. The hypnotic spell of the sea took hold of them both until Nora turned and protestingly exclaimed:

"Aren't you fearfully tired of seeing nothing but this great, blue, empty expanse of salt water?"

"My eyes could never tire if I had you to look at," said he, not by way of making love to her, but as a simple statement of fact.

Nora appeared happier. This buccaneer of hers was becoming more tractable, but he perversely hauled about on another tack and added:

"As long as there are ships to sail the sea, there will be men to go in them, men that will never tire of salt water though it treats them cruel. They will hear the voices of sweethearts and wives on shore, but they will not listen. The hands of little children will beckon, but they will not stay. 'Tis fine to be warm and dry in a house, and to see the green things grow, and men and women living like Christians, but if you are the seafarin' kind, you must find a ship and put out of port again. I am one of those that will never tire of it, Miss Forbes. Poor old Johnny Kent is different. He sits and sighs for his farm and will talk you deaf about it. My father was a shipmaster before me, and his people were fishermen in the Western Islands."

Nora sighed. O'Shea's caressing voice rose and fell with a sort of melancholy rhythm, an inheritance from his Celtic forebears. It was as though he were chanting a farewell to her. Her lovely, luminous eyes were suffused. The wind was warm and soft, but she shivered slightly.

"We had better turn back to the camp," said she. "My aunt will be looking for me."

They walked along the shining beach, thinking many things which could not find expression. O'Shea left her near her tent and was about to go to his own quarters when he overheard a stormy meeting between Nora and Gerald Van Steen. He hastened on his way, ashamed that he should have been an unwitting eavesdropper. It was most emphatically none of his business. His cheek reddened, however, and he felt gusty anger that Nora should be taken to task for strolling to the end of the key with him.

"A jealous man is the most unreasonable work of God," he said to himself. "'Twas a harmless walk we had."

Duty diverted Captain O'Shea from considering the disturbed emotions of Gerald Van Steen. Rations must be measured out and inspected, the muster roll called, the sick visited, and the sentries appointed for the night. He had finished these tasks and was standing near his tent when Van Steen approached in a hurried, angry manner. Surmising the cause, O'Shea caught him by the arm and led him in the direction of the beach, away from the curious eyes and ears of the camp.

Van Steen wrenched himself free with a threatening gesture. He had worked himself into a passion childishly irrational. O'Shea was inwardly amused, but his face was grave as he inquired:

"Why these hostile symptoms? Do not shout it all over the place. Tell it to me easy and get it out of your system."

This casual reception rather stumped young Mr. Van Steen. He gulped, made a false start or two, and sullenly replied:

"You and I will have it out as man to man, O'Shea."

"*Captain* O'Shea, if ye please, while I command this expedition," softly spoke the other. "As man to man? You have been a man only since I took charge of your education. Are ye sure you are ready to qualify?"

The shipmaster's smile was frosty, and his glance was exceedingly alert. Van Steen raised his voice to an unsteady pitch as he cried:

"That is a cheap insult. It shows what you are under the skin. Now, I don't propose to bring her—to bring any one's name into this—but you are to keep away, understand? It has to stop."

"Did any one request ye to tell me to keep away, as ye put it in your tactful way?" blandly suggested O'Shea.

"No; this is my affair. There has been enough of this blarneying nonsense of yours, and watching for a chance when my back is turned. If you were a gentleman, there would be no necessity of telling you this."

The veneer had been quite thoroughly removed from the conventional surfaces of Gerald Ten Eyck Van Steen. He was the primitive man ready to fight for his woman. O'Shea was divided between respect for him and a desire to swing a fist against his jaw.

"We have no gentlemen in my trade, of course," he retorted. "Now and then we pick up one of them adrift and do our best for him, and he turns to and blackguards us for our pains. Have ye more to say?"

"Considerably more. It is an awfully awkward matter to discuss, but it is my right, and—and——"

O'Shea interrupted vehemently:

"The hot sun has addled your brain. For heaven's sake, stop where you are. If it was me intention to make love to the girl and try to win her for myself, I would go straight to you. You would not have to come to me."

"You are a liar and a sneak, and I think you are a coward unless you have your men at your back," almost screamed Van Steen.

"Which I will take from no man," returned O'Shea, and he swung from the shoulder and stretched the young man flat on the sand. Several seamen and Cubans beheld this episode and ran thither.

"Pick yourself up and keep your mouth shut," exhorted O'Shea, "or ye will be draggin' some one's name into this after all."

Van Steen was sobbing as he scrambled to his feet, let fly with his fists, and was again knocked down by a buffet on the side of the head. O'Shea turned to order the men back to camp, and then quizzically surveyed the dazed champion.

"You will fight a duel with me or I'll shoot you," cried Van Steen. "At daylight to-morrow—with revolvers—at the other end of the key."

"I will not!" curtly replied O'Shea. "Ye might put a hole through me, and what good would that do? 'Tis my business to get these people away, and keep them alive in the meantime. As for shooting me informally, if I catch you with a gun I will clap ye in irons."

"But you knocked me down twice," protested Van Steen.

"And ye called me hard names. We are quits. Now run along and wash off your face."

The misguided young man marched sadly up the beach to find solitude, and was seen no more until long after night. O'Shea stared at his retreating figure and sagaciously reflected:

"He wants to fight a duel! 'Tis quite the proper thing. He figures it out that he is a buccaneer on a desert island, and 'tis his duty to play the part. Consistency is a jewel."

It seemed improbable that Van Steen had acted wholly on his own initiative. Then the provocation must have come from Nora herself. And what could have aroused Van Steen to such a jealous frenzy but her admission that she was fond of the company of Captain O'Shea?

"Right there is where I stop tryin' to unravel it," soliloquized the skipper. "'Tis not proper for a man to confess such thoughts. But I have no doubt at all that she stirred him up when he scolded her for walking on the beach with me this afternoon."

In the evening Johnny Kent became inquisitive. There was something on his mind, and he shifted

about uneasily and lighted his pipe several times before venturing to observe:

"I sort of wandered down to the beach, Cap'n Mike, when you and the millionaire coal-heaver were quarrellin'. I didn't mean to butt in and I hung back as long as I could——"

"Forget whatever you heard, Johnny. It was a tempest in a teapot."

The engineer scratched another match, cleared his throat, and diffidently resumed:

"Excuse me, but there was words about a duel. I was interested—personally interested, you understand."

"How in blazes did it concern you?" laughed O'Shea.

"Never you mind," darkly answered Johnny Kent. "Tell me, Cap'n Mike, ain't you goin' to inform the young lady that there came near being a duel fought over her?"

"Of course not. And don't you blab it."

"But she'd feel terrible flattered. Women just dote on having duels fought over 'em, accordin' to all I've read in story-books. Seems to me you ought to stand up and swap a couple of shots with Van Steen just to please the girl."

"I had not looked at it from just that angle," amiably returned O'Shea. "You surely are a thoughtful, soft-hearted old pirate."

"Well, the girl will get wind of it, Cap'n Mike. She's bound to. And maybe she'll feel pleased, to a certain extent, that a duel was pretty near fought over her."

"But what has all this to do with you personally?" O'Shea demanded. "'Tis none of your duel, Johnny. You would make a fine target. I could hit that broad-beamed carcass with me two eyes shut."

"And maybe I could put a hole in your coppers with my eyes open," was the tart rejoinder. "Anyhow, you agree with me, Cap'n Mike, don't you, that there's no solider compliment with more heft and ballast to it than to fight a duel over a lady?"

"I will take your word for it if ye will only explain what it is all about," yawned O'Shea.

"A man don't have to tell all he knows," was the enigmatical reply.

Whereupon Johnny Kent rolled over on his blanket, but he did not snore for some time. Staring at the canvas roof, or beyond it at the starlit night, he revolved great thoughts.

Fortune occasionally favors the brave. Next morning the chief engineer trundled himself across the intervening sand to pay his respects to Miss Hollister. The comparative calm of existence on the key was mending her shattered nerves. She felt a singularly serene confidence that the party would be rescued ere long, and the healthful outdoor life hastened the process of recuperation. With feminine ingenuity she managed to make her scanty wardrobe appear both fresh and attractive. Her favorite diversion was to sit on the sand while Johnny Kent traced patterns of his imaginary farm with a bit of stick. Here was the pasture, there the hay-field, yonder the brook, indicated by a wriggling line. The house would be in this place, large

trees in front, a sailor's hammock swung between two of them. Miss Hollister had several times changed the location of the flower-beds and paths, and was particularly interested in the poultry-yards.

Just before Johnny Kent loomed athwart her placid horizon on this momentous morning, the contented spinster was tracing on the white carpet of sand a tentative outline of the asparagus-bed to be submitted to his critical eye. A shadow caused her to glance up, and her startled vision beheld not the comfortable bulk and rubicund visage of the chief engineer, but the martial figure and saturnine countenance of Colonel Calvo. He was still arrayed in the panoply of war. The front of his straw hat was pinned back by a tiny Cuban flag. His white uniform, somewhat dingy, was brave with medals and brass buttons, and the tarnished spurs tinkled at his high heels. Unaware that he was Miss Hollister's pet aversion, the gallant colonel bowed low with his hand on his heart, smiled a smile warranted to bring the most obdurate señorita fluttering from her perch, and affably exclaimed:

"I have the honor to ask, is your health pretty good? We have suffer' together. I promise myself to come before, but my brave mens have need me."

"There is no reason why you should trouble yourself on my account, I am sure," crisply replied Miss Hollister. "Captain O'Shea is taking the best of care of us, thank you."

The colonel assumed a graceful pose, one hand on his hip, the other toying with his jaunty mustache. How could any woman resist him?

"I will be so glad to have you inspect my camp," said he, staring at her very boldly. "It is ver' military. That Captain O'Shea"—an eloquent shrug—"he is good on the sea, but he is not a soldier, to know camps like me."

"Captain O'Shea has offered to show me the camps. He is in command, I believe."

"That fellow do not command me. Will you come to-night? My soldiers will sing for you the songs of *Cuba Libre*."

"No, I thank you." Miss Hollister was positively discourteous.

"Ah, so beautiful a woman and so cruel," sighed the colonel, ogling her with his most fatal glances.

Miss Hollister spied Johnny Kent coming at top speed, and she looked so radiant that Colonel Calvo spun round to discover the reason. With a contemptuous laugh he remarked:

"The greasy ol' man of the engines! I do not like him."

Johnny Kent had read the meaning of the tableau. The colonel was making himself unpleasant to Miss Hollister. And the breeze carried to his ear the unflattering characterization of himself.

"He's playing right into my hands. It couldn't happen nicer if I had arranged it myself," said the chief engineer under his breath. His mien was as fierce as that of an indignant walrus as he bore down

on the pair and, without deigning to notice Colonel Calvo, exclaimed to Miss Hollister:

"Was anybody makin' himself unwelcome to you just now? If so, I'll be pleased to remove him somewhere else."

"You will min' your own business," grandly declaimed Colonel Calvo.

"You needn't answer my question, ma'am," resumed Johnny Kent. "This pestiferous Cuban gent wanders over here without bein' invited and makes himself unpopular. It's as plain as a picture on the wall."

The spinster realized that it was her duty to intervene as a peace-maker between these belligerents, but she felt powerless to move from the spot, which happened to be in the middle of Johnny Kent's imaginary pasture, between the brook and the hayfield. The proprietor thereof, advancing close to Colonel Calvo, thundered, "Ha! Ha!" and firmly grasped the warrior's nose between a mighty thumb and forefinger. The colonel yelled with rage and pain, and fumbled for the hilt of his sword. With dignified deliberation the chief engineer released the imprisoned nose, turned the colonel squarely around by the shoulders, and kicked him until his spurs jingled like little bells.

"There! I hope you're real insulted, right down to the heels," commented the avenger.

Colonel Calvo painfully straightened himself, managed to haul the sword clear of the scabbard, waved it undecidedly and shrieked:

"Mos' likely you have the pistol in your pants to kill me with. I will fight the duello with you. You have insult' me in my mortal part. You refuse me to fight with pistols, quick, as soon as it can be arrange'?"

"Bully for you," cordially answered Johnny Kent. "Sure thing. I'll be delighted." He had one eye on Miss Hollister as he continued in resonant tones: "We will duel to the death."

"I will sen' my frien' to see your frien', señor," was the grandiloquent response of Colonel Calvo. "An' I will kill you mos' awful dead."

"It will be a pleasure to turn up my toes in defence of a lady," fervently declaimed the engineer as Colonel Calvo limped in the direction of his own camp, filling the air with such explosive imprecations that it was as though he left a string of cannon-crackers in his wake. Johnny Kent mopped his face, smiled contentedly, and turned his attention to the dumfounded spinster.

"But are you in earnest?" she gasped.

"Never more so, ma'am," and he added, with seeming irrelevance, "I suppose you have heard that Cap'n O'Shea and Mr. Van Steen came near fightin' a duel yesterday afternoon."

"Yes, Mr. Van Steen admitted as much. It was a most inexplicable affair. What in the world has it to do with your terrible quarrel with Colonel Calvo?"

"You understand just why I am perpetratin' the duel with the colonel, don't you, ma'am?" asked Johnny Kent, showing some slight anxiety.

"I—I imagine—" She blushed, looked distressed, and said with a confusion prettily girlish, "I am afraid I had something to do with it."

"You had everything to do with it," he heartily assured her. "You don't feel slighted now, do you? I thought you might take it to heart, you understand—being sort of left out. Says I to myself last night, there'll be no invidious distinctions in Miss Hollister's neighborhood. She deserves a duel of her own, and I'll hop in and get her one the first minute that conceited jackass of a Colonel Calvo gives me a chance to pull his nose for him. That is strictly accordin' to Hoyle, ma'am. Pullin' the other fellow's nose is the most refined and elegant way of starting a duel. Kickin' him was an after-thought, to make sure he was insulted a whole lot."

"I appreciate your motive," murmured Miss Hollister, "but, oh, dear, it wasn't at all necessary. You and I are too good friends to require a duel as a proof of esteem. And I did not feel in the least slighted."

"Perhaps not; but you are bound to feel sort of gratified," stubbornly argued the portly squire of dames. "It's the nature of women to like to have duels fought over 'em. The colonel is as thin as a shad, and I suppose he'll stand edgewise, but maybe I can wing him."

"But what about you?" tremulously besought his lady fair, whose emotions were chaotic in the extreme.

"Me? Pooh! I've had too many narrow escapes

to be bagged by a google-eyed shrimp like this Calvo person," easily answered the knight-errant. "Now you just sit tight and don't get fretty, ma'am. You can bank on me every time. I'm shy of culture, but my heart is as big as a basket. And when I see my duty plain, I go to it *ma'am* hurry."

Miss Hollister's perturbed glance happened to fall on the half-obliterated plan of Johnny Kent's farm, in the midst of which she still stood. It appealed to her with an indefinable pathos. She could not understand why, but she began to weep, although a moment before she had perceived the wild absurdity of Johnny's Kent arguments.

"Why, you ain't supposed to cry," he exclaimed in great agitation; "I'm trying to please you."

"I—I—can see your good intentions," she tearfully faltered, "but I shall go to Captain O'Shea and beg him to forbid this duel—to prevent bloodshed. I shall be perfectly happy without it."

"Please don't interfere in men's affairs," implored the alarmed hero. "Women are too delicate to go prancin' in among us professional pirates. You'll feel better after it's over. I guess I had better leave you."

He fled from the sight of her tears, greatly distressed, wondering whether he might be mistaken in his theories concerning the operations of the feminine mind. She had behaved as if she did not want a duel, but he reflected:

"They're all geared contrariwise. You can never tell just what they do want. And it's a good bet

that she'd feel worse if I disappointed her about this duel."

The first assistant engineer called him to repair the condenser, which had been set up on the beach, and it was there that Captain O'Shea found him some time later.

"For the love of heaven, Johnny," exclaimed the skipper, "what infernal nonsense have you been up to now? The Cuban colonel came surging into me tent, foaming and sputterin' like a leaky boiler. He got all choked up with language, but I made out that ye have handed him seventeen kinds of deadly insults, and agreed to fight him with revolvers. Are ye drunk? The Cuban crowd is hard enough to handle as it is, and you have been me right-hand man. Is it one of your bad jokes?"

"Not on your life, Cap'n Mike," earnestly affirmed the engineer. "He made himself unpleasant to a friend of mine—ladies' names are barred. We fixed up this duel in perfectly gentlemanly style, and as a favor to me I ask you to keep your hands off. It won't be a public ruction."

"You butt-headed old fool, he may shoot you!"

"Well, Cap'n Mike, speakin' seriously," and Johnny's face was genuinely sad, "just between you and me, I wouldn't care a whole lot. I've lost my ship, and I'll never have money enough to buy a farm. And—well—she wouldn't look at me twice if we were in civilization among her own kind of folks. I didn't mean to slop over this way, but you are a good friend of mine, Cap'n Mike."

O'Shea laid a hand upon his comrade's shoulder and was moved to sympathy.

"You are making heavy weather of it, Johnny. Suppose I forbid this high-tragedy duel. I am still in command, ye understand. It would give me no great sorrow to see Colonel Calvo wafted to a better world, but I will be hanged if I want to lose you."

"I ask it as a favor, Cap'n Mike. I've done my best for you, blow high, blow low," doggedly persisted the other.

"'Tis not fair to put it that way, Johnny. Cool off a bit, and we will talk about it to-night."

"You're the boss, Cap'n Mike, and I'd hate to mutiny on you, but I've passed my word to the finest lady in the world that this duel would be fought. And a man that will break his word to a lady ought to be strung to the yard-arm."

O'Shea walked away and sat down in front of his tent. The Cuban camp was buzzing with excitement, and a grumbling uneasiness was manifest among the crew of the *Fearless*. The two factions cordially disliked each other. The story of the duel had spread like a fire. If anything happened to Johnny Kent, the *Fearless* men were resolved to annihilate the Cuban camp. Such intentions being promptly conveyed to the patriots, they swarmed about Colonel Calvo and announced their readiness to avenge him with the last drop of their blood.

O'Shea summoned Jack Gorham as his most dependable aid and counsellor. The melancholy sharp-

shooter listened respectfully. O'Shea waxed torrid and his language was strong.

"Johnny Kent is a great engineer and I swear by him," he declared, "but he is full to the hatches with sentiment, and it makes him as cranky as a wet hen. He is dead set on this comical duel, and I dislike to disgrace him by putting him under arrest. He would never sail with me again."

"Better let them fight," said Gorham.

"'Tis your trade," replied O'Shea. "You are biassed. I want ye to figure a way to make this duel harmless. Let them shoot all they like, but don't let them hit each other. You know how I feel about Johnny Kent, and little as I love Colonel Calvo, I am sort of bound to deliver him safe somewhere."

"When is this pistol party scheduled to happen?" asked Gorham.

"Early to-morrow morning."

"It will be easy enough to steal their revolvers while they're asleep, sir, and work the bullets out of the shells and spill most of the powder. Or I could file down the front sights. Why not make 'em postpone it for another twenty-four hours? The seconds will have a lot of pow-wowin' to do, and perhaps we can work out a better scheme."

"I agree with you, Gorham. A duel should be conducted with a great deal of etiquette and deliberation. 'Tis not a rough-and-tumble scrap, but more like a declaration of war. We will do it proper, even if we are ragged and shipwrecked."

Shortly thereafter Captain O'Shea issued his ultimatum to the combatants. They were to observe a truce until the morning of the second day. Meanwhile negotiations would be conducted in a dignified and befitting manner. Violation of this edict would be punished by confinement under guard. Johnny Kent grumbled volubly until O'Shea convinced him that the etiquette of the duelling code forbade unseemly haste.

"I take your word for it, Cap'n Mike. I don't want to make any breaks. This affair aims to be strictly accordin' to Hoyle."

V

SHORTLY after sunrise next morning the sentries, the cook, and a few sailors and Cubans who were early astir discovered a faint smudge of smoke on the horizon to the northward. They shouted the tidings, and Captain O'Shea tumbled out of his tent, rubbing his eyes. A long scrutiny convinced him that the steamer was heading to pass within sighting distance of the key. She was coming from the direction of the Cuban coast. Possibly she might belong to the Spanish navy. On the other hand, she might be a cargo tramp bound to the southward and seeking a South American port.

There is such a thing as becoming accustomed to the unexpected. Those who dwell in the midst of alarms acquire a certain philosophical temper which views life as a series of hazards. On this lonely key

in the Caribbean the daily routine of things had run along without acute symptoms of worry and dread, although the peril of discovery by a Spanish war-vessel was discussed by the evening camp-fires. So long as Captain O'Shea appeared unruffled, his followers saw no reason why they should lose sleep. To him it was like the toss of a coin. They were to be rescued or they were to be found by the enemy.

If he had seemed inactive, it was because this was an extraordinary shipwreck. To send the life-raft in search of succor was a forlorn hope, a desperate expedient, but even this was denied him. The wind was blowing steadily from the southward, day after day, and the raft would drift straight toward the coast of Cuba where no mercy was to be looked for. Because of the destruction of the Spanish gun-boat, these refugees were something else than castaways. They were men without a country, and death awaited them wherever flew the red and yellow flag of Spain.

Captain O'Shea turned from gazing at the distant smoke and awakened Johnny Kent.

"Rouse out, ye sleepy old duellist," he called. "Take a look at this vessel."

The engineer emerged from the tent and the two men stood side by side, their emotions weighted with poignant anxiety.

"We won't be able to tell what she is for some time yet," said Johnny Kent. "The sea is hazy. Yes, she's sure enough comin' this way, Cap'n Mike."

"'Tis best for us to be ready, whatever she is," replied O'Shea.

"I guess we'll postpone the arrangements for my duel. What's the orders?"

"All hands will move inside the earthworks right after breakfast," briskly spoke O'Shea. "Take charge of the men in your department, Johnny. See that the rifles are clean and serve out plenty of ammunition. And store all the fresh water ye can."

"If it's a Spanish vessel, can we stand her off at all, Cap'n Mike?"

"She will have a hard time shellin' us out, Johnny. That four-sided refuge we piled up with our shovels is nothing but a big sand-bank. Shells will bury in it without explodin'. 'Tis the theory of modern fortifications. We can do our best, and maybe luck will turn our way. Anyhow, 'tis more sensible than to be shot by drum-head court-martial, which is what will happen to us if we throw up our hands and surrender. If they find us a hard nut to crack, perhaps we can make terms of some kind."

"What about the ladies? I was hopin' they wouldn't have to go up against any more excitement," wistfully said Johnny Kent.

"I have delivered me cargo. It stands no longer between us and our guests, Johnny. And 'tis my opinion that you and I will not let them suffer for the sake of saving our own skins."

"Right you are, Cap'n Mike. I don't care a cuss what becomes of me if you can get Miss Hollister—I mean both of 'em, of course—on board a respectable vessel of some kind."

Soon the camp was in commotion. The methods of the leaders were brutal and direct. This was no time for soft words. Jack Gorham moved quietly, in several places at once, and when a man would argue or expostulate he was threatened with the butt of that terrible Springfield. At his side, like a huge, black shadow, stalked Jiminez, a militant assistant who jumped at the word of command.

Johnny Kent, no longer a sighing sentimentalist, bellowed at his engineers, oilers, and stokers, and the discipline of shipboard took hold of them. There was the loudest uproar in the Cuban camp. Because of their race, the patriots had to be melodramatic, to defy the unknown steamer by running to the beach and brandishing their rifles and machetes at the ribbon of smoke that trailed across the opalescent sea. But Colonel Calvo, very much more of a man in this emergency than when he had been afloat on the bounding billows, drove them back to camp and got them well in hand.

The canvas shelters were hastily ripped down and set up inside the earthworks as a protection against the sun which blazed into this windless enclosure with fierce intensity. Johnny Kent paused to say to O'Shea:

"It's goin' to be hades in there for the women. They can't stand it long."

"They won't have to, Johnny. This will be a short performance. Ye can expect a show-down between now and sunset."

The haze had vanished. The steamer was visible

beneath a far-flung banner of smoke. A tiny foremast, a ring around it, and O'Shea exclaimed:

"A fighting-top! It looks to me like the cruiser that chased us down the coast."

"That's her, dollars to doughnuts, Cap'n Mike. She ain't in such a hurry to-day."

"No need of it. We can't get away."

"Do you think she's really lookin' for us?"

"'Tis not a bad guess, Johnny. As soon as word was telegraphed to Havana that the gun-boat was destroyed, the whole blockadin' fleet must have been ordered to watch for us at both ends of Cuba. They knew we had to round Cape Maysi or San Antonio to get home. And when we were not seen or reported anywhere they may have begun to look for us down here to the south'ard."

"She can't help sightin' the wreck of the *Fearless*," said the engineer.

"And then she will know who we are. 'Tis time for all hands to take to cover."

The Spanish man-of-war, gray, and slim, and venomous, slowly lifted her hull above the sea-line, and was heading to pass to the eastward of the sandy islet. It was a fair conjecture that her captain was roving away from his station on the coast in the hope of finding the *Fearless* disabled or short of coal. Some of the refugees surmised that she might pass them unobserved, but at a distance of two or three miles she turned and laid a course to pick up the key at closer range.

Captain O'Shea climbed the rampart and lashed

an American ensign to a spar thrust into the sand. The bright flag was neither half-masted nor reversed as a signal of distress. The breeze flaunted it as a defiance, a message from men who had forfeited its protection, who cheered the sight of it for sentimental reasons which they could not have clearly explained. The governments of the United States and Spain were at peace. This was not an affair between the two Powers. It was a little private war, a singular incident. And yet it was somehow fitting, after all, that these outlaws should prefer to see the stars and stripes waving over their heads.

Presently Colonel Calvo planted beside this ensign the tricolor of the Cuban revolutionaries, with the lone star. It was done with a certain amount of ceremony which commanded respect and admiration. It signified that he, too, speaking for his men, was ready to make the last stand, to accept the decree of fortune. Johnny Kent grasped his hand and apologized.

The cruiser moved cautiously nearer the key, taking frequent soundings. The wreck of the *Fearless* had been discovered and must have been identified, for the cruiser cleared for action, and the bugles trilled on her decks. The huge, four-sided mound of sand heaped upon the back of the key evidently puzzled the officers. After a long delay, the vessel let go an anchor a thousand yards from the beach and spitefully hurled several shells into the shattered hulk of the *Fearless*.

Then a pair of eight-inch turret-guns were trained

at Captain O'Shea's thick walls of sand. A string of small flags fluttered from the cruiser's signal-yard. O'Shea comprehended the message without consulting the international code-book.

"She invites us to surrender," he explained, "which I decline to do at present. Let her shoot away. Maybe she will tire of it and leave us."

No white flag was displayed on the rampart, and the cruiser lost her temper. A projectile passed over the key with a noise like a derailed freight-train. Others followed until the sand was spurting in yellow geysers. Such shells as struck the earthwork burrowed deep holes without causing appreciable damage. The Spanish commander soon perceived that this impromptu fortification was costly to bombard. His gunners were merely burying shells in a large heap of sand, and his government had not been lavish in filling his magazines. A mortar battery was needed to discommode this insane crew of pirates. And undoubtedly, if a landing-party should be disembarked on the open beach, these rascals of Captain O'Shea would fight like devils. The cruiser had been ordered to fetch them back to Havana alive and they would be formally executed in the Cabañas fortress as a warning to other hardy seafarers in the filibustering trade. These men had not only fired on the Spanish flag, but they had also blown it out of water.

But how were they to be extracted from their refuge without sacrificing the lives of Spanish sailors and marines? *Carramba*, here was a tough problem!

It might be feasible to starve them out by means of a siege, but the cruiser had no abundance of coal and stores. A storm would compel her to steam out to sea, or run for the coast. And if the key were left unguarded a merchant-vessel might happen along and rescue O'Shea and his men. And for all the commander knew, they had already sent a boat to summon help.

The cruiser ceased firing. Thereupon Captain O'Shea convened a council of war within his defences. The enclosure had been deluged with flying sand, but there were no casualties.

"There will be no more bombardment," he told his people. "The cruiser will do one of two things. She will lay off the key and wait for us to give in, or she will send her boats ashore to-night and try to rush us in the dark."

"We'll make it unhealthy for 'em," stoutly declared Johnny Kent.

"Me and my men will die for *Cuba Libre*," said Colonel Calvo, his theatrical manner fled, his words spoken with a fine simplicity.

"There don't seem to be any way out," observed Jack Gorham.

O'Shea gazed at them in silence. There was no reproach in their speech or manner, no thought of blaming him for this tragic predicament. And yet it was his responsibility and his alone. He might have abandoned the *Fearless* in the bay and taken these people ashore where they could find refuge with the Cuban army of Gomez. If he had been

guilty of an error of judgment, then he should pay the price. There dawned upon him a clear conception of his own private duty.

"We'll stick it out as we are till sunset," he said abruptly. "Nothing more can happen before then. How are the ladies, Johnny?"

"I'm afraid they'll go under if we have many days like this, Cap'n Mike. This is an infernal place to be cooped up in."

"I am ashamed to face them, Johnny. 'Tis all my fault that they are in this mess with us. I should have put them ashore when I had the chance. But a sailor will think of his ship when he can save her, and 'tis his chronic notion that he is safer at sea than anywhere else."

Through the long, long day the sun poured wickedly into the fortification. The cruiser rolled lazily at her anchorage and made no sign of renewing the attack. O'Shea lay flat behind a small embrasure and vainly searched the sea for the sight of a merchant-steamer which might intervene in behalf of the castaways. This was his last hope.

With a weary sigh he watched the red sun slant lower and lower. His lucky star had failed him. He made his decision. Presently he beckoned Gerald Van Steen and asked him to go outside the fortification, where they could have speech in private. The young man was sullen, but O'Shea smiled with engaging friendliness and said:

"'Tis no time to nurse grudges, me lad. Let us shake hands and forget it."

"Oh, I'm not thinking of that row of ours," wearily muttered Van Steen. "It's of no consequence now. I'm not such a howling cad as to consider myself in any way. What do you propose to do with Miss Forbes and Miss Hollister? I have kept my mouth shut all day, waiting for the great Captain Mike O'Shea to do what would have occurred to any man with his wits about him."

"May I ask what it is that ye would call so plain to see?" patiently queried the shipmaster.

"Signal to the cruiser that you have in your company three persons who were picked up from their yacht. Or you could have sent us off on the life-raft, and given me a chance to explain matters to the commander and show him my credentials. I don't want to be a quitter, you know, but really this is none of my affair, and my first duty is to get these ladies home in safety."

"I grant ye that," slowly replied O'Shea. "And I think no less of you for wishing to leave us to stew in our own juice. You have behaved very well, barring the one flare-up with me. Now I will explain why what ye suggest is not so easy. The cruiser would pay no heed to signals about you. 'Twould be looked at as some kind of a trick. Can ye not realize that the master of the navy vessel yonder is wild with rage to exterminate me and the rest of the *Fearless* company? He sees red, man. As for sending ye on the life-raft, it means that several of me own men must go with you to handle the lubberly thing. And they would be dragged

aboard the cruiser and held there. I was willing to go meself, but I could not navigate the raft so short-handed. And I hoped the luck might turn before night."

Van Steen had lost his hostile expression. He regretted his hasty words of condemnation. The intonations of O'Shea's voice strangely moved him. And the sailor's face, no longer bold and reckless, held a certain quality of gentleness, one might almost call it sweetness.

"Oh, confound it!" cried Van Steen. "You put me in the wrong, as usual. And I'm damned if I can feel square in trying to quit you and leaving you to take your medicine. I am one of the crowd, don't you see, and proud of it. They are a bully sort."

"I have never been crowded into such a tight corner," said O'Shea with a smile, "but 'tis the way of life that when a man is young and strong, and used to long chances, he thinks he will not be tripped. This is my affair, not yours, so trouble yourself no more."

"What do you propose to do, Captain O'Shea? You have made up your mind, I can see that."

"The cruiser will be in a mood to hold communication with us now. 'Twould have been useless to try it this morning. But they have discovered that 'tis not easy to smoke us out of our hole."

Presently he unrolled a bundle of signal-flags saved from the *Fearless*, and selected those he wished to use. Knotting them together, he hoisted the

string on the spar beneath the American ensign. The commander of the cruiser read the message requesting that a boat be sent ashore in order to discuss terms of surrender. He was in no mood to discuss terms of any kind, but it appeared necessary to parley with these unspeakable scoundrels on the key. Perhaps they realized the hopelessness of their obstinacy and their spirit was broken.

A cutter was manned, and as it skimmed over the calm sea and drew near the breakers Captain O'Shea walked to the beach, Colonel Calvo accompanying him as interpreter. Van Steen followed as a rightful participant in the conference. The ladies were requested to remain within the fortification. It was not to be taken for granted that the cruiser would respect a truce. The seamen and the Cubans behind the banks of sand were savage and desperate, as was to be expected of men for whom surrender meant the firing-squad.

The crew of the cutter held her off the beach as the part of caution. They were ready to pull out to sea at a moment's notice. O'Shea and Colonel Calvo splashed into the water and stood beside the boat. The commander himself was in the stern-sheets, a corpulent, black-bearded man of an explosive temper. He waited, glowering, for O'Shea to speak. He would waste no courtesy on pirates.

"You will play fair with me," said the shipmaster, and Colonel Calvo translated as well as he was able. "I have ye covered with fifty rifles. I am Captain Michael O'Shea. Ye may have heard tell of me."

The commander nodded and profanely replied that he knew nothing good of Captain O'Shea or the *Fearless*. It was an act of God that they would make no more voyages.

"Much obliged for your kind wishes," resumed O'Shea. "I am sorry to have put you to so much trouble. I will waste no more words. I have in me party the young man standing yonder on the beach and two ladies that I picked up adrift from a stranded American yacht. 'Tis not right for them to suffer any longer. I want ye to carry them to port."

The commander had heard of no wrecked yacht in these waters. As for the women, it was most unfortunate for them. Captain O'Shea had only to surrender his force and the women would be taken on board the cruiser and properly provided for. Then the story could be investigated.

O'Shea broke in angrily to say to Colonel Calvo: "He is like a mad bull. There is no reason in him at all. He will make us surrender sooner, he thinks, to save the ladies. He will use any weapon that comes to hand."

The Spanish commander raised an arm in an impassioned gesture. As if unable longer to restrain himself, he shouted:

"My brother was the captain of the gun-boat that perished in Santa Marta Bay, and he died with his vessel. By the blood of God, shall I parley with you?"

Gerald Van Steen waded out to the boat. He would speak for himself. That there should be any

question of rescuing Nora Forbes and Miss Hollister fairly stunned him. His bearing was intrepid, but his lip quivered as he imploringly exclaimed to Colonel Calvo:

"Tell him that I don't care a hang about what happens to me if he will take the women off. And if money will tempt him, I'll pay down my last dollar to save the lives of the whole party. He will be a rich man."

The Spanish officer laughed with a contemptuous shrug. His heavy visage was inflamed. He was of that type of his race which regarded Americans as "Yankee pigs." Personal hatred and the desire of private vengeance made him proof against bribery. Moreover, he had no faith in the protestations of Van Steen. As O'Shea had put it, he was a man who saw red. The futility of appealing to him was so obvious that O'Shea interfered to play his trump card.

"If you land your sailors to-night and try to take us," said he, and his voice was hard and deliberate, "'twill be the toughest job ye ever tackled. We have nothing to lose, and we will be behind the earthworks yonder. You can gamble that there will be two dead Spaniards for every one of us ye wipe out. As for starving us, I have thought it over, and ye will not try it. You would be laughed at from Havana to Madrid for not daring to attack a handful of shipwrecked men. Ye have a dilemma by the horns. And your rage has made ye blind as a bat. You are all for giving us a short shrift, and no

doubt your hot-headed officials in Havana have egged ye on to it. But it will make a big diplomatic row, and when the smoke clears ye will be sorry. It will sound very rotten that ye had no mercy on a crew of castaways. And I will say, for your own information, that Uncle Sam has been very touchy about these quick-action executions ever since the *Virginus* affair."

The commander had ceased to fume. He was doing O'Shea the favor of listening to him. The stronger personality had made an impression. O'Shea perceived this and he went on to say:

"What I am leading up to is this:—I am ready to surrender meself and face the consequences if you will take my guests aboard and leave my men and the Cubans on the key. They will take chances of being found by a friendly vessel. You will lose no lives. I am the man your government wants. You will win the big reward offered for the capture of Captain Michael O'Shea. And there will be no complications between your government and mine. 'Tis me own fault that the party is stranded here. I will pay the price. 'Twill be easy enough for ye to explain it. You can keep your crew quiet, and the story will go out that ye took me off the wreck of my steamer and the others got away."

This was a proposal which took the commander all aback. He considered it in silence and his gaze was less unfriendly. O'Shea concluded with dogged vehemence:

"You can take it or leave it. If you refuse, you

must come and take us, and, so help me, as I tell ye, it will cost you a slather of men before ye wipe out my outfit."

Here was a lawless castaway, a man beyond the pale, who insolently defied the arms and majesty of Spain. But there was a certain plausible method in his madness which caused the commander to waver. His implacable hostility had sensibly diminished. It would, without doubt, win him great distinction to return to Havana with the redoubtable Captain Michael O'Shea a prisoner. As for the men of the outlawed party, most of them had been invisible from the cruiser, and their number was a mere matter of conjecture. It was therefore possible for the commander to inform his officers that in accepting the surrender of Captain O'Shea he had captured all of the expedition that was worth while seizing. He had served thirty years in the Spanish navy without seeing a man slain by bullet or shell. The prospect of a fierce and bloody engagement with men who would fight like wolves failed to arouse his enthusiasm.

"I will signal my answer in one hour," said he. "What you propose has surprised me. It is most unusual. It was not expected."

O'Shea waded ashore and Colonel Calvo offered his hand as they stood on the beach and watched the cutter dip its flashing oars in the groundswell.

"I have dislike' you sometimes," said the colonel. "But now I tell you I have been much wrong. I

will be ver' proud to go with you to Havana if it will save the lives of my braves' of soldiers."

"You are a good man yourself when ye have terra firma under you," was the hearty response.

Johnny Kent came trotting to meet them, exclaiming beseechingly:

"What was it all about, Cap'n Mike? Why couldn't you put me next before you flew the signals?"

O'Shea painstakingly retold the argument which he had unfolded to the Spanish commander, and the chief engineer listened with his chin propped in his hand. He breathed heavily and grunted disapproval.

"But what else was I to do?" impatiently demanded O'Shea. "I got you all into this, and I must get you out. And maybe I have found a way."

"That ain't what I'm growlin' about," strenuously protested Johnny Kent. "Why didn't you let me in on this deal? Why not let me surrender with you? Doggone it, I'm no slouch of a pirate myself, with considerable of a reputation. Perhaps the Spaniards might think I was worth bargainin' for, too."

"I want to go it alone, Johnny. 'Tis the only square thing to do."

"But you and me have been playin' the game together, Cap'n Mike. And you don't ketch me layin' down on you just because you've come to the end of your rope."

"Not this time, Johnny. 'Tis only making us feel bad to wrangle about it."

The castaways had ceased to gaze at the encircling horizon for sight of smoke or sail. It came, therefore, as an incredible thing when a sentry at an embrasure yelled and capered like a lunatic. Every one rushed out and beheld the black hull and towering upper-works of a huge passenger steamer. She was coming up from the westward and had altered her track as though curious to discover why the Spanish cruiser should be at anchor near the key. Would she halt or pass on her way? Captain O'Shea, unable to credit his vision, told his men to fire volleys, and ran up the signal-flags to read:

"Stand by. We need assistance."

It was more than he dared hope that the steamer would read his call for help, but she drew nearer and nearer the key, slowed speed, and rounded to within a few hundred yards of the Spanish cruiser.

"It's a British vessel, a White Star liner," bawled Johnny Kent. "What is she doin' in these waters?"

"One of those winter-excursion cruisers out of New York, I take it," replied O'Shea. "She is making a short cut across from the Leeward Islands or somewhere below us, running from port to port. I hope she will realize that this is no holiday excursion for us."

The refugees made little noise. They were no longer actors but spectators. They saw the liner exchange signals with the cruiser. Apparently this method of communication was unsatisfactory, for

soon a boat passed between the two vessels. There followed a heart-breaking delay. Dusk was obscuring the sea when a yawl pulled by a dozen British seamen moved from the liner's side and danced toward the key. The ramparts of land were instantly deserted. O'Shea's men and the Cubans ran wildly to the beach, no longer afraid, confident that salvation had come to them. They rushed into the water and dragged the stout yawl high and dry.

There stepped ashore a stalwart, energetic man in the smart uniform of a captain in the White Star service. The crowd fell back as he brusquely demanded:

"What kind of a queer business is this? Where is the chief pirate?"

"O'Shea is me name," acknowledged the leader. "'Tis quite a yarn, if ye have time and patience to hear it."

"So you are O'Shea," and the skipper of the *Caronic* chuckled. "Take me inside that extraordinary sand-heap of yours, if you please, and talk as long as you like."

He grasped O'Shea's arm and they vanished within the empty defences.

"I have come ashore to get at the bottom of this fantastical situation," said Captain Henderson of the *Caronic*, whose smile was both friendly and humorous. "The commander of the Spanish cruiser told me to keep my hands off and to go about my business. Cheeky, wasn't it? He swore he had a nest

of bloody pirates cornered on this key, and he expected to capture them to-night."

"So he decided to turn down my proposition," muttered O'Shea.

"He referred to it. But his officers were keen to win a bit of glory for themselves, and they argued him the other way round, as I figured it from his heated remarks. He didn't relish the job of sailing into you chaps. In fact, the black-whiskered don was in a state of mind. Are you, by any chance, a British subject?"

"No, Captain Henderson, but I might find ye a Britisher or two among me crew. I have an assorted company of gentlemen of fortune."

O'Shea explained matters at some length, and Captain Henderson vehemently interrupted to say:

"I don't know that it makes a lot of difference whether you are British subjects or not. Blood is thicker than water. Shall I steam away and leave you to be shot on the say-so of a raving Spanish skipper?"

"I should be disappointed in you if ye did," gravely answered O'Shea. "'Tis not what I would do for you."

The master of the *Caronic* permitted O'Shea to finish his narrative.

"So you picked up the Van Steen party?" he rapped out. "We heard of the loss of the *Morning Star*. The Spanish skipper out yonder said I might take them off in my ship before he attacked you."

"And what do ye propose to do about us?" wist-

fully asked O'Shea. "Of course this is none of your row, and your ship is not a British navy vessel——"

"But I am a British seaman," snapped Captain Henderson. "And you are shipwrecked people who have asked me for assistance. That is all I have to know. And, by George, it's all I want to know."

"And ye will take us off?"

"At once. And I imagine I had better land you in a British port. What about Jamaica?"

"Jamaica will suit us, Captain Henderson. The United States will not be salubrious for us until this piracy charge blows over. And the Cubans can dodge across to their native land. But what will ye do if the Spanish cruiser objects?"

"She will not fire on my flag," thundered the master of the *Caronic*, "nor will she dare to take shipwrecked men from my decks. Tell your people to be ready to go aboard. I will signal my chief officer to send more boats."

Cheering and weeping, the company of the *Fearless* abandoned their stronghold. It was an evacuation with the honors of war, and the American ensign was left flying above the huge heap of sand.

Disinclined to join the jubilation, Captain Michael O'Shea wandered away from his seamen and stood gazing at the liner whose lights were blazing like a great hotel. Nora Forbes walked along the beach until she came to him. He waited for her to speak.

"I saw you leave the crowd," said she, "and I followed you. I wanted to talk to you this after-

noon—to tell you—to try to tell you—what I thought of the sacrifice you were prepared to make. Were you going away, to your death, without saying good-by to me?”

He took her hand in his as he answered:

“It was hard enough to face my finish without bidding farewell to you, Nora Forbes. But this is our good-by, here on the beach to-night.”

“What do you mean?” she exclaimed unsteadily.

“Must I say it all—must I tell you in so many words—are you afraid to—oh, can’t you understand what I want you to know?”

“Yes, I think I understand,” and his voice was very gentle. “Look at the liner yonder.” He raised his arm in an eloquent gesture. “You will be aboard soon, and ye will be among hundreds of people that belong to your own world. And ye will sit at dinner with them in the grand saloon, and they will talk to you about the things you have known and lived with all your life. And ye will find out that you belong with them.

“As the days go by, Nora Forbes, you will wonder more and more if this voyage of ours ever really happened. ’Twill be like a dream of romance and adventure, and moonshine, that could not have been at all.”

“But this is real and all the rest of my life has been just make-believe,” she mournfully whispered.

“’Tis the magic of the sea and the strong winds, and the free life, but it will pass and you will be grateful to me that I could see clearly.”

"Why are you so sure? Why do you speak for me?"

"Because I would have ye happy, Nora Forbes. 'Tis what God made you for. Look at me, a rover and a rough one, and never will I be anything else. I am not fit to be in your company at all. You have talked very plain to me, for a girl like yourself. You thought to yourself that I was afraid of your social station and your money and your friends, and so you would be telling me that I had a chance with you because I would not say it for meself. 'Tis wonderful to have you step down from your throne and be kind to the likes of me. And it will make your memory sweet and fair to me as long as the breath is in me. But you are dreaming dreams, and you will awake when the liner has carried ye back to your own people."

"But I can never again be happy there," she faltered.

"Ah, yes, you can, and you will. And you will thank me."

She stayed to hear no more, but turned and hastened back to her friends, angry, humiliated, unreconciled. The master of the *Fearless* pulled his straw hat over his eyes and turned in the direction of his hilarious sailors. He hated himself, but he had no regrets.

"I had sooner be shot," he said to himself, "than to talk to her like that. But every word of it was true. And maybe she will find it out. 'Tis a strange, queer world, full of surprisin' things, and 'tis hard to steer a course that will not fetch you on the rocks.

But I held true to me compass bearings this night, and the light that guided me was the right one."

He mustered his men and held them ready for the boats from the liner. An hour later the defenders were welcomed on board the *Caronic*, which promptly sailed without consulting the Spanish cruiser. They were received as heroes and nothing was too good for them. But O'Shea refused to accept the first-cabin state-room offered him.

"You have an officers' mess-room," he told Captain Henderson, "and if ye don't mind, I will stay with them and find a spare bunk for'ard."

For once Johnny Kent refused to follow the lead of his skipper. He was graciously pleased to take the quarters allotted him, and proposed to mingle with the passengers. Early next morning he wallowed in a tub, summoned the ship's barber, and arrayed himself in clothes borrowed from the chief engineer of the *Caronic*, who chanced to be a person of ample dimensions. Thus transformed, Johnny Kent was no longer a ruffian of the high-seas. He had an aspect of dignified, mellowed respectability. His brick-red countenance radiated kindly interest and benevolence. Small children ran to him and instantly became his friends. The blustering note had gone from his voice. He checked his worst grammatical blunders and his shrewd eyes were quick to observe the manners of his fellow-passengers, which he sedulously set himself to copy. Strolling forward after breakfast, he discovered Captain O'Shea and confided:

"This touch of high life suits me down to the

heels, Cap'n Mike. And I'm not such a bull in a china-shop as you might think. The passengers are crazy to meet you. They want to hear about your adventures."

"I am comfortable right here, Johnny. You are welcome to the bouquets. Have ye seen Miss Hollister this morning?"

"No, she's still abed, but the ship's doctor says she will come around all right. I'll surprise her some, won't I? Honestly, Cap'n Mike, after I make two or three more voyages with you, if they're risky enough to pay big wages, I'm goin' to pick out that farm down in Maine and hand over a first payment on it."

"Have ye consulted with Miss Hollister?"

"Of course. She's my right bower when it comes to good advice. Not that she is personally interested—I was just dreamin' dreams, you understand—but if I had the farm maybe I could see her again and talk about pigs and hens, and gardens and flowers."

"You are not as down-hearted as when ye were on the key, Johnny," smilingly quoth Captain O'Shea.

"It's the clothes and the refined surroundin's, Cap'n Mike. I take to 'em somehow more than I ever did before. I seem sort of changed."

"'Tis likely a first-class marine engineer will be spoiled to make a lubber of a farmer," returned O'Shea.

"It's a rough life we lead, Cap'n Mike, and a man of my age hadn't ought to stick to it too long."

Jack Gorham joined them, looking even leaner and sadder than when he had been in the *Fearless*.

"And what will you be doing with yourself?" cordially inquired O'Shea.

"Mr. Van Steen offers me an easy job in New York, sir, and a salary, whether I work or not. But I'm on nobody's pension-roll. I shall get out of Jamaica in a sail-boat and sneak over to Cuba and join the rebels."

"And will big Jiminez go with ye?"

"He is sort of tore up in his mind, sir, between following you on the chance of another fancy voyage and duckin' into the jungle with me."

"Tell him to go with you, Jack."

"Well, Captain O'Shea, I hope I'll have the pleasure of sailing with you again. I've enjoyed it," exclaimed the soldier.

"If you need money, Jack, what I have is yours. I have a bit stowed away for emergencies."

"You can stake Jiminez and me to a meal-ticket in Jamaica and the price of a little boat, sir, and I'll pay the loan out of the first Spanish officer I pot with the old Springfield."

When the stately *Caronic* steamed into the harbor of Kingston the passengers crowded her rail to admire the verdure-clad mountains and the lovely vales lush with palms and bananas. The excursionists planned to spend the day ashore, and after they had disembarked, the crew of the *Fearless* and Colonel Calvo's Cubans filed down the gangway. Miss Hollister, Nora Forbes, and Gerald Van Steen were waiting to bid them farewell and God-speed.

They had lived and suffered so many things together that it was difficult to realize that this was the journey's end.

Gerald Van Steen spoke awkwardly and with much feeling.

"You have been very good to us, Captain O'Shea. I shall not make an ass of myself by offering you money. But perhaps I can help you to find another ship, and the house of Van Steen & Van Steen will always be at your service."

"I have me doubts that a highly respectable banking-house will care to back my enterprises," replied O'Shea. "But now that Johnny Kent has violent symptoms of mendin' his ways there may be hope for me. You were a good shipmate, Mr. Van Steen. If ever ye want a job, I will be glad to sign you on as a stoker."

"Will you dine with us at the hotel to-day?"

"Thank you, but I must look after my men."

The farewell between Nora Forbes and Captain O'Shea had been said on the beach in the starlight. Now their glances met.

"Good-by and God bless ye," said he. "The voyage seems like a dream, no doubt."

"Perhaps it may some day, but not yet," she told him.

"My dear friends, that voyage was the realest thing that ever happened," was the earnest declaration of Johnny Kent, and no dissent was heard from that shipwrecked and marooned spinster, Miss Katharine Hollister.

THE KING OF TRINADARO

I

CAPTAIN MICHAEL O'SHEA and Johnny Kent sat by a window of the Jolly Mermaid tavern at Blackwall on the Thames below London. These two leisurely drank mugs of bitter-beer and gazed with professional interest at the crowded shipping of that great seaport thoroughfare which sailor-folk call London River.

The Jolly Mermaid was one of a jostling row of ancient buildings with bow-windows and balconies painted in bright hues which overhung the tide at Blackwall, to remind one of the maritime London of towering frigates and high-pooed galleons and stout seamen of Devon. The near-by shore was filled with ship-yards and weedy wharves, and a little way down river was the entrance of the vast inland basin called the East India Docks, where soared a wonderful confusion of spars and rigging, and the red funnels of the Union Castle liners lay side by side.

On the turbid river moved in procession a singular variety of craft: drifting Thames barges with dyed sails, square-riggers in tow, Norwegian tramps half hidden beneath uncouth deck-loads of lumber, rusty Spanish fruiterers, coastwise schooners, spray-stained

steam-trawlers from the Dogger Bank, stubby Dutch eel-schuits, stately mail-boats homeward bound from the tropics, sooty colliers from Cardiff.

They slid past with an incessant din of whistles which, warning, expostulating, shouted the rules of the road in the language of the sea.

These familiar sights and sounds pleased Captain O'Shea, and he was contented with his seat by the window of the Jolly Mermaid and the excellent brew dispensed by the apple-cheeked young woman behind the bar. Amphibious loafers drifted in and out or cast anchor on the wharf alongside, riggers, watermen, dock-laborers, sailors, who seemed to have a world of time on their hands. Their gait was slouching, their attire careless, and their conversation peppered with sanguinary references to their eyes.

"'Tis a restful place, Johnny, and as diverting as a theatre," observed O'Shea.

The chief engineer returned rather fretfully:

"I'm willing to be idle in this bit of slack-water for a while, and sort of pull myself together, Cap'n Mike. But this don't earn wages, and I ain't makin' much headway toward buyin' that farm down in the State o' Maine."

Whimsical amusement lighted O'Shea's bold, smooth-shaven features as he replied:

"I am not a man to seek a humdrum life afloat or ashore, you impatient old pirate. There was a lot of fuss kicked up at home about that Cuban voyage of ours, as ye well know. And there was a

strong chance that we would be laid by the heels in one of Uncle Sam's jails for breaking the laws between nations. We are better off where we are."

"That Spanish gun-boat got in our way and her intentions was plain blood-thirsty," grumbled Johnny Kent. "What if we did ram her and then blow her up? She interfered with men who were tryin' to make an honest livin' on the high-seas."

"Argue as far as ye like, Johnny. It won't alter the fact that it was healthier for you and me to make ourselves hard to find."

"But it's discouragin' to look for another ship here in England, Cap'n Mike. We're fish out of water."

"'Tis not easy to find our kind of a ship anywhere," O'Shea reminded him. "There are no revolutions poppin' the lid off in Central or South America, and we will sit tight and trust in me lucky star. I have a gold piece or two left in the toe of the sock where I stowed it against times like this. And we have not sunk so low that we must sign on for a lawful voyage."

Johnny Kent crooked a finger at the bar-maid and sought consolation in another mug of bitter, while Captain O'Shea turned to a morning newspaper and ran his eye down the ship-news column to note the arrivals and departures. Then he cast a cursory glance at the foreign despatches, which might, perchance, disclose some disturbance of the world's peace and an opportunity for venturesome men used to alarms and stratagems.

Johnny Kent was moved to begin an aimless yarn about a certain wicked skipper of Yankee clipper fame who fetched his second mate all the way home from Cape Town doubled up in a hen-coop as a punishment for impertinence. O'Shea listened politely, but with a manner slightly absent-minded, having heard the tale of the unfortunate second mate and the hen-coop in at least five different ports.

The yarn was cut short, and the two men screwed around in their chairs to stare at a visitor whose presence in the humble longshore tavern of the Jolly Mermaid was most extraordinary.

He was an elderly and very dignified gentleman, of a spare figure and the stiffly erect carriage of an army officer. His features, thin and rather refined than forceful, were given an air of distinction by a white mustache and imperial. From the silk hat and frock-coat, with the ribbon of an order in the lapel, to the tan gaiters and patent-leather shoes, he was dressed with fastidious nicety. In the dingy tap-room of the Jolly Mermaid he was startlingly incongruous.

The stranger had the grand manner and it fitted him like a glove. He was not offensively self-important, but one conjectured him to be a personage who expected the world to show him deference. The bar-maid, who was no dunce at reading human nature, bobbed a courtesy and withheld the flippant persiflage which was wont to delight the nautical patrons of the place.

A moment later there entered the tavern a brisk

young man with a sandy complexion and a roving eye, who was smartly but showily attired, a keen, up-to-snuff young man who knew his way about. With a respectful bow he addressed the impressive elderly gentleman.

"I told him to meet us here, if Your Majesty pleases."

The apple-cheeked bar-maid was threatened with a fainting spell at the intimation that royalty stood within the tavern walls, but rallied bravely to suggest in a fluttered voice:

"There's a tidy little back room, your royal 'ighness, where you can set down private-like without common folks starin' and gawkin' at your Worship."

"Thanks. I am rather tired after tramping about the docks," amiably replied the personage in the pleasantly modulated accents of the cultivated Englishman. To the brisk young man he said:

"Let us sit down, my dear baron, and look over some of the memoranda while we are waiting."

"Certainly, Your Majesty," quoth the young man, and with this they passed into the little back room and closed the door. A dock-laborer ripped out an oath of amazement and clattered from the bar to tell his friends that "one o' them blighted, bleedin' kings was in the Jolly Mermaid, large as life, so 'elp me Gawd."

That brace of exiled mariners, Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent, gazed blankly at each other, and tacitly agreed to wait and try to fathom the riddle. They had dealt with presidents of uneasy republics

near the equator, but a real king, to be surveyed at close range, was a fascinating novelty.

Johnny Kent had carefully adjusted his spectacles to survey this rare object, and he now shoved them up beyond his bushy brows before he hoarsely confided to his comrade:

"I thought they went about disguised, Cap'n Mike, same as we run a blockade with no lights and the steamer's name-boards covered up. Is he the real thing or is it just play-actin'?"

"Europe is full of kings that have been kicked out of their berths," answered O'Shea. "Maybe this one is a has-been, but he doesn't look to me like a counterfeit. And I would not set him down for a lunatic out for a stroll with his keeper."

"He handles himself as sane as you or me," agreed the chief engineer. "But this is surely a doggoned queer place to find a stray king."

"'Tis worth watching, Johnny. I'm on me beam-ends for puzzlement."

Ere long there appeared from the street a bow-legged, barrel-chested, hairy-fisted man with a rolling gait, whom a landlubber might have classified as a rough-and-hearty British seaman accustomed to command vessels in the merchant trade. A captious critic would have perhaps surmised that he had been pickled in rum as well as in brine. Glancing at a card held between a grimy thumb and finger, he asked the bar-maid:

"Is Baron Frederick Martin Strothers hereabouts, my girl? Captain Handy's compliments."

"If you mean the dashin' young man with a red weskit, 'e is settin' in yonder with His Majesty."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Captain Handy. "My business is with His Majesty, but the baron has charge of the arrangements as minister of finance. A nipper of Scotch whiskey, neat, miss, before I talk to 'em."

"What sort of a king is 'e, and what's his bloom-in' handle?" she eagerly besought him. "Are you makin' gyme of me?"

The hearty British shipmaster looked inscrutable, tossed the whiskey into his heated coppers, and slowly assured her:

"Women's curiosity is the fatal weakness of the sex, my dear. A king is a king wherever you find him. And my advice to you is not to go braggin' about and telling all hands that His Majesty has patronized the Jolly Mermaid."

He trudged to the rear room, hat in hand, and timidly knocked on the door. As it was opened, the quick ear of Captain O'Shea heard the mysterious personage saying to the brisk young man:

"A steamer of the tonnage of this *Tyneshire Glen* is what I wish. If your investigation has satisfied you that she is thoroughly sea-worthy and in good repair and Captain Handy also recommends her——"

The door closed behind Captain Handy, and O'Shea, glancing in that direction, smiled cynically and observed to Johnny Kent:

"Did ye size up this Handy man? You know

the kind. Every big port has them: broken ship-masters, disrated mates, that aren't fit to take a scow to sea."

"Sure! They've borrowed money off me from Baltimore to Singapore. This Captain Handy must have sighted an easy mark in the offing."

O'Shea pondered for a moment and asked:

"Did ye hear mention of the *Tyneshire Glen* steamer just now? Do you happen to know the vessel? I can't place her."

Johnny Kent grunted as if he had sat upon a tack and answered with heated emphasis:

"Maybe it's the old *Tyneshire Glen* that was carryin' cotton out of Savannah years ago. I went aboard to see her chief once and her plates was rusted so thin that I could have thrown a wrench through 'em."

Captain Handy had left the door of the back room unlatched and a gusty draught of sea-breeze blew it partly open. The watchful pair in the tap-room had a glimpse of Captain Handy standing stolidly between His Majesty and the minister of finance, and heard him huskily declaim:

"The *Tyneshire Glen* is a bargain at thirty thousand pounds, and you needn't take my word for it. Baron Strothers here has interviewed the brokers that have her for sale, and he knows the price they put on her."

"I have full confidence in the judgment of my minister of finance, with Captain Handy's expert opinion to assist him," easily replied His Majesty.

"Most of my papers were lost at sea," hastily put in Captain Handy, as if to forestall an awkward question. "They were tied up together, your Royal 'ighness, when the *Falls of Clyde* steamer went down and I saved the lives of forty-seven passengers and was the last man to leave her when she foundered under my feet. The newspapers praised me so that a modest man 'ud blush to repeat it."

"Baron Strothers has investigated your record, so he informs me, and he advises me that you are to be depended upon," was the warm assurance.

In the tap-room O'Shea chuckled skeptically and said to Johnny Kent:

"'Tis likely enough he lost his papers, but I mistrust his version of the story. What kind of a flim-flam is this, anyhow? The king and the minister of finance are discussing a rotten ship and a rotten skipper as if the both of them were to be taken seriously."

After more conversation which the listeners failed to catch, the trio in the back room ended the session and prepared to leave the tavern. As they walked out past the bar Captain Handy was arguing with awkward gestures, the elderly personage was listening courteously, and the brisk young man alertly kept an eye on both, as though he had an absorbing interest in the interview. In front of the tavern they parted, Captain Handy to turn in the direction of the East India Docks, the puzzling pair of notables to seek the railroad station to London.

Upon O'Shea and Johnny Kent there fell a prolonged spell of silence. Each was piecing theories together and discarding them as unsatisfactory. Of one thing they were convinced. This royal visitation had not been an elaborate hoax, and the explanation of lunacy was finally and emphatically dismissed.

"'Tis no case of barnacles on the intellect," was the verdict of O'Shea, "barrin' the fact that he ought to have more sense than to listen to the palaver of a rascal like this Captain Handy. Why didn't we think to follow them up and see where they went?"

"I'm too short-winded to make a good sleuth-hound, Cap'n Mike, and it ain't dignified for a man of my years."

"Well, then, who is this Captain Handy?" demanded O'Shea. "We'll try another tack."

He questioned the bar-maid, who was disappointing.

"The man never showed hisself in 'ere before," said she. "You're more likely to find out about 'im at the docks."

"Say, Cap'n Mike," exclaimed Johnny Kent with puckered brow, "ain't there some kind of a book written about kings, their habits and their names, and the various breeds of 'em? And where you're most apt to find 'em? Do they generally run around loose?"

"I'm not personally acquainted with a whole lot of them, Johnny; but as a rule 'tis safe to bet they don't come wanderin' into sailors' taverns convoyed by the minister of finance."

"Suppose we take his word for it," was the suggestion. "Call him a king. He's lookin' for a ship and a captain, ain't he?"

"Now you talk hard sense, Johnny. That's where I pricked up my ears. Maybe we can cross his bows again if we look sharp."

Next morning they carefully scrutinized the "Court Circular" of the *London Times*, and were more at sea than ever at discovering that the only visiting royalty comprised an unimportant cousin of the house of Hanover from a German duchy and the dusky ruler of a native state of India. That a full-fledged king and a minister of his cabinet, both indubitably Englishmen, could be strolling about London unnoticed by the newspapers and unknown to the public was fairly incredible, and yet no mention could anywhere be found of the illustrious patrons of the Jolly Mermaid, although O'Shea bought the morning journals by the fistful.

It occurred to him to pay a call at a ship-brokers' office down in Leadenhall Street, and Johnny Kent rode with him on top of a 'bus. They had made the acquaintance of the managing partner of the firm under the palms of a Venezuelan seaport, and he cherished a strong friendship for this pair of adventurous rovers. He was anxious to find a ship for O'Shea, and the latter dropped in now and then in search of news.

The comrades twain were about to dodge through the traffic of Leadenhall Street and enter the office of their friend when O'Shea plucked Johnny Kent

by the sleeve and pulled him back into an adjacent door-way. A brisk, sandy-haired young man was also doubling among the stream of vehicles which roared from curb to curb and aiming his course for the ship-brokers' office.

"'Tis the minister of finance, Johnny," cautiously spoke O'Shea. "Look at him. There he goes, right into Tavistock & Huntley's, the same destination as ours."

"Why not go in and meet him, Cap'n Mike? Maybe George Huntley will introduce us and we can slip in a few questions."

"Because I do not like this sprightly right bower of royalty, Johnny. I took a violent dislike to the Baron Frederick Martin Strothers at first sight. And me hunches about people are worth heeding when they take hold of me as strong as this one did."

They surmised that the brisk young man with the red waistcoat must have business to transact with Tavistock & Huntley, for he remained inside a good half-hour. Then the watchers caught no more than a farewell glimpse of him as he hastily emerged and popped into a passing hansom. Thereupon they sauntered into the ship-brokers' office and were cordially greeted by George Huntley, managing partner, a stocky, bald-headed person who looked as substantial as a brick house. The spirit of romance was in him, however, and he secretly envied O'Shea his illogical pursuit of hazards for sheer love of them.

Steering them into a small private room, he plumped himself into the chair at the desk, waved them to a leather-covered lounge, and inquired with much gusto:

"And how are my disreputable friends this morning? Anything in the wind?"

"'Tis still blowing dead calm for us, but the weather is suspicious in one quarter of the compass," answered O'Shea. "Tell me, George, what do you know about the young man that just now whisked out of here—the fancy lad with the loud vest and the high-steppin' manner?"

Huntley tilted his chair, clasped his hands across a comfortable waistband, and replied in his deliberate way:

"I have laid eyes on him only twice. His name is Strothers, I believe, and he calls himself a baron. One of those Continental titles, I fancy. You buy them, you know. This day of last week he came into our place with Captain Handy, who used to sail in the Blue Anchor service."

"Got into trouble with his owners, didn't he?" interrupted O'Shea, at a guess.

"Yes. He lost a steamer in the Bay of Biscay, and the evidence went to show that he was drunk at the time. His certificate was taken away or suspended; I forget the details. A rather shabby lot is Handy. As I was about to tell you, O'Shea, the pair of them, Captain Handy and this spruce young man, Strothers, came in to ask our cash selling-price for the *Tyneshire Glen*, which is laid up in the East

India Docks. We have no interest in the vessel beyond representing the owners, who want to get rid of her."

"And did you give the precious pair of two-spots a price on her?" blandly inquired O'Shea.

"I offered them the *Tyneshire Glen* for twenty-four thousand pounds as she stands," replied Huntley. "It's all she's worth. She is a big steamer, almost five thousand tons, but she will need a lot of repairs. Captain Handy claimed that he had found a possible buyer in whose interests young Strothers was acting. Of course we were willing to pay Handy a decent commission if the deal went through."

O'Shea looked sidewise at Johnny Kent, who, on occasions, was bright enough to see through a hole in a grindstone. They kept their thoughts to themselves, and O'Shea commented non-committally:

"Of course Captain Handy is entitled to a commission if he finds ye a customer for the steamer, George. 'Tis an honest chance for the poor devil to pick up a few dollars. And so the young man, Strothers, came back this morning? Do I show too much curiosity in asking what he had to say?"

"You are welcome to all I know. He told me that the gentleman whose interests he represented had inspected the *Tyneshire Glen* yesterday and thought she would answer his purpose. The price was satisfactory and he would like a three-days' option, which I was very willing to give him."

"And the price was still twenty-four thousand

pounds?" violently put in Johnny Kent with a snort as if his steam were rising.

"Precisely twenty-four thousand pounds, or one hundred and twenty thousand dollars of your Yankee currency or thereabouts. Are you thinking of buying her yourself, Johnny?" said Huntley with a broad smile.

"Not on your life," was the fervent response. "I'd be afraid to sneeze on board of her in the docks for fear her rivets would fly off."

"Oh, she isn't as bad as all that. A well-built steamer is the *Tyneshire Glen*, with lots of service in her."

"What she needs is a new hull, boilers, and engines," grunted Johnny. "Say, George Huntley, did this young man, Strothers, mention anything about buyin' the steamer for a king that is roamin' around London without any tag to him?"

"A king!" ejaculated the ship-broker, blinking like an astonished owl. "Are you chaps raggin' me?"

"Maybe the joke is on us, George, or else Cap'n Mike and me have been seein' visions and hearin' things that ain't so."

Huntley cast an appealing glance at O'Shea, who said:

"'Tis evident that ye are not acquainted with our particular king, George. You do not move in royal circles. We will tell ye the answer later. About this young man that calls himself a baron. Did he leave any address behind him?"

"Yes. He is staying at the Carleton. If the op-

tion expires I shall take it for granted that he doesn't want the steamer. If he pays down the cash I shall be ready to make out the papers and give Captain Handy his commission. Now you ought to tell me why you are so keen on knowing all about the business. If you keep mum, you are a pair of blighters and no friends of mine."

O'Shea hauled Johnny Kent to his feet and remarked:

"We thank you kindly, George. You are a good-natured man and we have made a nuisance of ourselves. 'Tis the honest truth that we know very little more about this young man and the *Tyneshire Glen* than ye know yourself. But what we do know we will first investigate."

"You are conspirators born and bred," laughed Huntley, rather pleased to have an ordinary business transaction wrapped in romantic mystery. "Come and dine with me as soon as you have unravelled the plot."

They straightway betook themselves to the nearest public-house, where in a quiet corner a council of war was convened. It was obvious that they had run athwart a scheme to defraud the confiding purchaser of the *Tyneshire Glen*. And their sympathies went out strongly to the royal victim. Whether or not he was a real king was beside the mark. He was very much the gentleman, and he had trusted too much in the loyalty and integrity of that enterprising young man who was called the minister of finance.

"'Tis as plain as the big nose on that red face of yours, Johnny," exclaimed O'Shea. "The two crooks are standing in together. Captain Handy recommends the ship as all right. This Baron Frederick Martin Strothers backs him up and advises His Majesty to buy her. The two blackguards get a price of twenty-four thousand pounds from George Huntley, and then tell this innocent potentate that the price is thirty thousand pounds. The difference is six thousand pounds—thirty thousand dollars—which this pair of land-sharks will split up and stick in their own pockets. And they will doctor the bill of sale so the poor deluded monarch will never know what happened to him."

"That was what we heard 'em say in the Jolly Mermaid, Cap'n Mike. The price was thirty thousand pounds."

"'Tis me opinion that a minister of finance like this could bankrupt a kingdom, give him time enough," said O'Shea. "He is working the game for all it's worth. He will loot the treasury as long as it looks safe and easy, and then he will resign his what-do-ye-call-it—his portfolio—and leave his buncoed Majesty to figure out the deficit."

"That poor king deserves to be delivered from his lovin' friends," replied Johnny Kent. "What's the orders now?"

"We will ring up full speed ahead and find this king. If the minister of finance is at the Carleton Hotel, 'tis a good bet that His Majesty is not far away. That busy young man will not separate himself from a good thing."

The fashionable Carleton was unfamiliar territory to the inquisitive mariners, but they strolled boldly through the corridors until they fetched up in front of a desk presided over by an immaculate clerk with a languid manner who appeared indifferent to their wants. After waiting several minutes for some recognition, Captain Michael O'Shea sweetly remarked:

"Will ye answer a civil question or will I climb over the counter and jolt you wide-awake?"

The languid person looked attentively at the resolute features of the speaker and hastily answered:

"Beg pardon—beg pardon—what can I do for you, sir?"

"Tell me if a king is stopping in this hotel of yours, and does he have a minister of finance called Baron Strothers?"

"Ah, you mean His Majesty, King Osmond of Trinadaro," and the clerk delivered these resounding syllables with unction. "Yes, he is a guest of the hotel."

"He is a real one, do you get that?" soberly whispered O'Shea to his comrade before he again addressed the clerk.

"We wish to see him on important business. We will write our names on a card."

"Baron Strothers receives such callers as are personally unknown to His Majesty," the clerk explained.

"We do not wish to see the young man," said O'Shea.

"My orders are to send all cards and messages to him," persisted the clerk.

The two visitors drew apart from the desk and put their heads together.

"The minister of finance will not let us get within a cable's length of his boss if he thinks we are seafarin' men," whispered O'Shea.

"The swindler may have took notice of us in the Jolly Mermaid," growled Johnny Kent. "We might send up a card and make headway as far as this Strothers person. Then I could knock him down and sit on his head while you rummaged the royal apartments and found the king."

"Your methods might strike these hotel people as violent, Johnny. You're a good man at sea, but I would not call ye a diplomat. Anyhow, we will take a chance of running the blockade that this crooked minister of finance has established to prevent honest men from talking to his employer."

Returning to the desk, O'Shea picked up a pen and wrote on a blank card:

"Captain Michael O'Shea and John Kent, Esq., U. S. A., to see King Osmond on a matter that he will find interesting."

Promptly in answer to this message came word that Baron Strothers would see the gentlemen. A hotel attendant conducted them to a suite on the second floor. At the threshold of a sort of anteroom they were met by the brisk, self-possessed young man, who gazed sharply at the sunburnt strangers, hesitated a trifle, and invited them to enter. Offer-

ing them cigars, he bade them be seated, and again scrutinized them as if striving to recall where he might have seen them elsewhere.

Captain O'Shea, at his ease in most circumstances, and particularly now when he held the whip-hand, asked at once:

"Are we to have the pleasure of paying our respects to His Majesty?"

"You Americans are so delightfully informal," smiled the minister of finance. "An audience is arranged beforehand if I consider it worth while."

"But this king of yours takes a special interest in ships and sailors," suggested O'Shea. "And we have information that he will find useful."

Baron Frederick Martin Strothers changed color just a trifle and his manner was perceptibly uneasy as he explained:

"I am awfully sorry, but he is not in at present. He will be disappointed, I'm sure. You are ship-masters or something of the sort, I take it."

"You guess right," was the dry comment of O'Shea. "I have heard that ye are fond of talking to seafaring men yourself."

The shot went home. The young man moved in his chair and looked painfully uncomfortable. Nervously twisting a cigar in his fingers, he replied:

"Ah, yes. Now I know. You must have seen me at the East India Docks."

"There or thereabouts, but no matter," said O'Shea. "His Majesty is not in, you say. And when will he be in the hotel again?"

"Not for several hours. He went out with the minister of foreign affairs to keep an important appointment. Will you state your business to me? That is the customary procedure."

Johnny Kent was for denouncing the young man to his face, but O'Shea nudged him and smoothly made answer:

"It would please us better to see the king himself. We can come again, or we can look for him on his way in and out of the hotel."

The young man could not dissemble signs of impatience to be rid of these pertinacious intruders.

"If you have a ship to sell, or you are looking for positions, this is only wasting time," said he. "I presume you heard something of our errand among the docks."

"Yes, we have heard of it," and O'Shea bit off the words. "Well, Johnny, shall we go below and wait till His Majesty heaves in sight? This minister of finance will give us no satisfaction. And I am not used to dealing with understrappers."

"You are impertinent!" cried the young man. "I have been as courteous as possible. You will leave at once, or I shall ask the hotel management to put you out."

Up from a chair rose the massive bulk of Johnny Kent, and his ample countenance was truculent as he roared:

"You'll throw us out, you impudent son of a sea-cook? No, Cap'n Mike, I won't shut up. I ain't built that way. Diplomacy be doggoned. I'm liable to lose my temper."

"'Tis a large-sized temper to lose, and I hereby hoist storm-signals," said O'Shea with a grin as he neatly tripped the minister of finance, who was endeavoring to reach an electric push-button.

The fervid declamation of Johnny Kent must have echoed through the apartments. It sufficed to attract the notice of an erect, elderly gentleman in another room who opened a door and stared curiously at the strenuous tableau. At sight of the kindly, refined face with the snowy mustache and imperial, O'Shea gleefully shouted:

"The king, God bless him! So this bright young minister of finance was a liar as well as a thief!"

Comically abashed, Johnny Kent mumbled an apology for making such an uproar, at which the elderly gentleman bowed acknowledgment and said to the perturbed and rumpled Strothers:

"My dear baron, will you be good enough to explain?"

"These ruffians insisted on seeing you, Your Majesty, and when I tried to discover their business they called me names and assaulted me," sputtered the young man in a heat of virtuous indignation.

"He was afraid of the truth," cried O'Shea. "We came to tell Your Majesty that he has cooked up a job to cheat ye out of six thousand pounds, and we can prove it up to the hilt. We caught him with the goods."

"That sounds a whole lot better to me than diplomacy," approvingly exclaimed Johnny Kent.

Bewildered by the vehemence of these outspoken

visitors, King Osmond I of Trinadaro turned to the sullen minister of finance and inquired, still with his placid kindliness of manner:

"These men do not look like ruffians, my dear baron. What are their names, and who are they? And what is the meaning of this grave charge they bring against your integrity?"

"I am O'Shea, shipmaster, hailing from the port of New York," spoke up the one.

"I am Johnny Kent, chief engineer to Captain Mike O'Shea," said the other, "and I hail from the State o' Maine. And we can show you our papers. We didn't lose 'em in the Bay of Biscay."

Strothers stood biting his nails and shifting from one foot to the other, for once stripped of his adroit, plausible demeanor, nor could he find, on the spur of the moment, the right word to say. The royal personage said it for him.

"I think you had better retire. I wish to hear what Captain O'Shea and Mr. Kent may have to tell me."

The amiable monarch was unconsciously swayed by the virile personality of Captain O'Shea, who dominated the scene as though he were on the deck of his own ship.

Baron Frederick Martin Strothers made a last attempt to protest, but Johnny Kent glared at him so wickedly and O'Shea moved a step nearer with so icy a glint in his gray eye that there was a moment later a vanished minister of finance.

The etiquette of courts troubled O'Shea not in

the least as he cheerily yet respectfully suggested to the perplexed elderly gentleman:

"Now, King Osmond, if you will please sit down and let us talk things over with ye as man to man, we'll tell you how it happened."

The personage obediently did as he was told, nor could he feel offended by the shipmaster's boyish candor. O'Shea chewed on his cigar and his eyes twinkled as he glanced at the stubborn visage of Johnny Kent, which was still flushed. His Majesty began to get his wits together and to wonder why he had permitted this brace of total strangers to take him by storm. O'Shea broke into his cogitations by explaining:

"You are surprised that ye chucked the trusted minister of finance out of the room and consented to listen to us at all. In the first place, we are not askin' anything of you. What I mean is, we felt bound to put you next to the dirty deal that was framed up to rob ye."

"We saw you in the Jolly Mermaid tavern, and we liked your looks," ingenuously added Johnny Kent. "We decided to do you a good turn, whether we ever saw the color of your money or not."

"And we didn't like the cut of the jib of your minister of finance," resumed O'Shea. "And we were dead sure that Captain Handy was rotten."

King Osmond earnestly interrupted:

"But I have had all the confidence in the world in Baron Strothers, and as a British sailor of the tarry breed, Captain Handy——"

"The two of them are tarred with the same brush," exclaimed O'Shea. "They fixed it up between them to pay twenty-four thousand pounds for the *Tyneshire Glen* and sell her to you for thirty thousand. 'Tis a simple matter to produce the evidence. Send a messenger to Tavistock & Huntley in Leadenhall Street. They named the price to Captain Handy and your precious minister of finance. 'Tis a clear case."

"You can buy her yourself from George Huntley, and he'll be darn glad to get his price," chimed in Johnny Kent. "That ought to prove it. But if you'll listen to me, you'll have nothin' to do with the *Tyneshire Glen*."

King Osmond's faith in human nature had been severely jarred, but somehow he could not doubt the statements of these rugged men who drove their words home as with a sledge-hammer. Toward the graceless minister of finance he felt more sorrow than anger as he wove together in his mind this and that circumstance of previous transactions which should have made him more vigilant. But the culprit was the son of a dear friend, and his credentials had been impeccable.

"I shall obtain from Tavistock & Huntley confirmation of your story, as you suggest," he slowly replied to O'Shea. "In the meantime I wish you would tell me about yourselves."

"We are looking for big risks and big wages," said O'Shea with a smile. "Johnny Kent and I are better known in the ports of the Spanish Main

than in London River. We have made voyages to Hayti and Honduras and Cuba without the consent of the lawful governments, and we know our trade."

King Osmond I reflectively stroked his white imperial, and his face assumed an expression of vivid interest. These men were different from Captain Handy. They would neither cringe nor lie to him, and they looked him squarely between the eyes.

"Will you be good enough to come into my own rooms?" said he. "We shall find more privacy and comfort. I should like to hear of your adventures along the Spanish Main."

With a courteous gesture he showed them into a much larger and more luxurious room which was used as a library or private office, inasmuch as a large flat-topped desk was strewn with books, pamphlets, and documents, and more of them were piled on tables and on shelves against the walls. As temporary headquarters for royalty at work, the room suggested industry and the administration of large affairs.

So friendly and unconventional was the reception granted them that Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent were made to feel that their intrusions demanded no more apologies. Their curiosity fairly tormented them. It was on the tips of their tongues to ask the host what kind of a kingdom was his, and where it was situated, but this would be rudeness. O'Shea took note of several admiralty charts on the desk, two of them unrolled with the corners pinned down, and a rule and dividers for measuring distances.

While O'Shea talked, Johnny Kent let his eyes wander to a small table at his elbow. It was covered with magazines, government reports, and newspaper clippings. One of the latter was so placed that he was able to read it from where he sat, and with absorbed interest he perused the following paragraphs:

Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach, of the ancient Norfolk family, has lived on the Continent for the last dozen years, and is better known to the boulevards of Paris than to London. He was never considered eccentric until recently when his claim to the island of Trinadaro in the South Atlantic as a sovereign realm aroused much interest and amusement. He assumed the title of King Osmond I.

It is said that he has created an order of nobility, and that the insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro have been bestowed upon the fortunate gentlemen composing his cabinet and coterie of advisers. A Court Circular is expected to appear shortly, and a diplomatic service will be organized.

Until His Majesty is ready to sail for Trinadaro to occupy his principality, the royal entourage will be found in the state apartments of the Hotel Carleton. Elaborate preparations are in progress for colonizing the island of Trinadaro, and a ship-load of people and material will leave London in a few weeks.

King Osmond I has a very large fortune. He is unmarried, and his estates, at his death, will pass to the children of his only brother, Sir Wilfred Sydenham-Leach of Haselton-on-Trent. The kinfolk of His Majesty are alarmed, so it is reliably reported, lest his wealth may be squandered on this curiously mediæval conception of setting up an independent principality upon an unproductive, volcanic island in mid-ocean which no nation has taken the trouble to annex.

Slowly and carefully Johnny Kent possessed himself of this information with never a flicker of a smile. The solution of the mystery of King Osmond I impressed him as neither grotesque nor curiously mediæval. In all London the King of Trinadaro could not have found two men of readier mind to fall in with his project and pretensions. To play at being a king on a desert island, to have the means to make it all come true—why, thought Johnny Kent, and he knew O'Shea must instantly agree with him, any man worth his salt would jump at the chance.

He was anxious to pass the tidings on to his comrade, and when the conversation slackened he edged in:

"We must be on our way, Cap'n Mike. His Majesty is good-hearted to listen to us, but it ain't polite to talk his ear off."

With this speech went so elaborate a wink that O'Shea comprehended that the engineer had something up his sleeve. Their host cordially declared that he must see them again, and made an appointment for ten o'clock of the next forenoon. They took their departure after friendly farewells and steered a course for Blackwall and the tavern of the Jolly Mermaid.

O'Shea was as delighted as a boy to learn that Osmond I was about to found an island kingdom. It was a more attractive revelation than if he had been discovered to be the inconsequential ruler of some effete little domain of Europe. And

if one planned to set himself up in business as a sovereign, it was proper to use all the pomp and trappings and ceremony that belonged to the game.

"If he is to have a navy," cried O'Shea as he pounded his friend on the back, "I know where he can find an admiral and a fleet engineer."

"Not so fast, Cap'n Mike. I have a notion that he'll have his own troubles gettin' to his kingdom. Any man that can be buncoed as easy as he was is liable to have all his playthings taken away from him before he has a chance to use 'em. I'll feel safer about him when he gets clear of London River."

Before seeking the royal audience next morning they went to Leadenhall Street to see George Huntley. The ship-broker greeted them indignantly.

"You would try to hoodwink me, would you?" exclaimed he. "I have found out who your mysterious king is. I received a letter from him last night, asking information about the price of the *Tyneshire Glen*. I had no idea it was this crazy Colonel Sydenham-Leach that calls himself ruler of Trinadaro."

"Own up like a man, George," shouted O'Shea. "Ye would like nothing better than to be this kind of a king yourself."

"You have read my thoughts like a wizard. But, confound you, you have spoiled the sale of a steamer for me. How about that?"

"We have tried to keep an estimable king from going to Davy Jones's locker in a floating coffin that ye call the *Tyneshire Glen*," severely retorted O'Shea.

"Have ye any steamers that will pass honest men's inspection?"

"Plenty of them," promptly answered Huntley.

"Then we will look at two or three of them to-day, after we have paid our respects to His Majesty. We will not let him be cheated out of his eye-teeth. We have decided to protect him. Isn't that so, Johnny?"

"He needs us, Cap'n Mike."

Huntley became serious and took them into the rear office before he confided:

"I don't know, I'm sure, whether you chaps are joking or not. However, here is a bit of news for you on the quiet. I met a friend of mine, a barrister, yesterday. We had luncheon at the Cheshire Cheese and something or other set him to talking about this Sydenham-Leach affair. It seems that the lawyers are quite keen about it. The family relations are planning to kick up a devil of a row, to bring proceedings under the lunacy act, and prevent this King Osmond from sailing off to his silly island of Trinadaro. They hate to see a fortune thrown away in this mad enterprise, as they call it."

O'Shea was righteously wrathful as he flung out:

"Would they interfere with a gentleman and his diversions? Hasn't he a right to spend his money as he pleases? Have ye ever seen him, George? He is a grand man to meet, and 'tis proud we are to be his friends."

"Oh, I imagine they will have a job to prove he

is insane," said Huntley. "But they may make a pot of trouble for him."

"I suppose they can pester him with all kinds of legal foolishness and haul him before the courts, and so on," agreed O'Shea. "It would break his heart and spoil all his fun. 'Tis an outrageous shame, George. What is the system in this country when they want to investigate a man's top story?"

"I asked the barrister chap," replied Huntley. "The friends of the person suspected of being dotty, usually his near relatives, lay the case before one of the judges in lunacy, and he orders an inquiry, which is held before a master in lunacy. Then if the alleged lunatic demands a trial by jury he gets it. If he can't convince them that he is sound in the thinker, his estate is put in charge of a committee duly appointed by law."

O'Shea listened glumly and glowered his intense displeasure. If the law could interfere with a man who wished to be king of an island which nobody else wanted, then the law was all wrong.

"And these indecent relatives who want his money will wait and spring a surprise on him," said the aggrieved shipmaster. "They will take his ship away from him and knock all his beautiful schemes into a cocked hat."

"I imagine he would not be allowed to leave England if the proceedings were started," said Huntley.

Johnny Kent, who had been darkly meditating, aroused himself to observe explosively:

"We'll get him to sea in his ship whenever he

wants to sail, and the relatives and the judges and the masters in lunacy be darned. It ain't the first time that you and me have broken laws in a good cause, Cap'n Mike. You come along with us, George Huntley. We're on our way to have a confab with His Majesty, and maybe you can do some business with him right off the reel. He ought to load his ship and head for blue water as quick as the Lord will let him."

II

BEHOLD, then, the pair of exiled Yankee mariners stanchly enlisted on the side of King Osmond I of Trinadaro, against the designs of all who would thwart his gorgeous and impracticable purposes. That his rank and title were self-assumed and his realm as yet unpeopled impressed these ingenuous sailormen as neither shadowy nor absurd.

King Osmond I was an elderly gentleman of a singularly guileless disposition, and the notoriety attending his unique project had caused him to be surrounded by persons who knew precisely what they wanted. Of these the vanished minister of finance, Baron Frederick Martin Strothers, of the brisk demeanor and the red waistcoat, had been a conspicuous example. It was a rare piece of good fortune for the amiable monarch that there should have come to his aid two such hard-headed and honest adventurers as O'Shea and Johnny Kent.

As the result of several interviews they were engaged to select a steamer and to take charge of her for the voyage to Trinadaro. Their qualifications were warmly indorsed by the well-known ship-broking firm of Tavistock & Huntley, of Leadenhall Street. The managing partner, that solid man with the romantic temperament, took the keenest interest in every detail of the picturesque enterprise. It would have been a temptation not easy to resist if King Osmond had offered him the place of minister of marine, with the bestowal of the insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro.

The august personage was prodigiously busy. Several secretaries and stenographers toiled like mad to handle the vast amount of clerical work and correspondence. The king planned to carry with him a sort of vanguard of subjects, or colonists, who were to erect buildings, set up machinery, till the soil, prospect for mineral wealth, and otherwise lay the foundations of empire. These pioneers were largely recruited from his own estates and villages in Norfolk, and formed a sturdy company of British yeomanry.

Captain Michael O'Shea was never one to smother his opinions from motives of flattery or self-interest, and what information about Trinadaro he had been able to pick up on his own account was not dyed in glowing colors.

"I have not seen the island meself, Your Majesty," said he, "but the sailing directions set it down as mostly tall rocks with a difficult landing-place and

a dense population of hungry land-crabs as big as your hat. And if it was any good, would not some one of these benevolent Powers have gobbled it up long ago?"

King Osmond pleasantly made answer to such objections.

"Several years ago I made a long voyage in a sailing-ship on account of my health, Captain O'Shea, and we touched at Trinadaro to get turtles and fresh water. It was then that I conceived the idea of taking possession of the island as an independent principality. Although it has a most forbidding aspect from seaward, there is an inland plateau fit for cultivation and settlement. It contains the ruined stone walls of an ancient town founded by the early Portuguese navigators. And it is well to remember," concluded the monarch of Trinadaro with a whimsical smile, "that available domains are so scarce that one should not be too particular. Trinadaro appears to have been overlooked."

"'Tis a rule that the Christian nations will steal any territory that is not nailed down," was the dubious comment of O'Shea. "They must have a poor opinion of Trinadaro, but, as ye say, 'tis about the only chance that is left for a king to work at his trade with a brand-new sign over the door."

Johnny Kent spent most his time down river among the London docks. Wherever sea-going steamers were for sale or charter his bulky figure might have been seen trudging from deck to engine-room.

At length, with the royal approval, O'Shea had the purchase papers made out for the fine steamer *Tarlinton*, which was berthed in a basin of the East India Docks. She was a modern, well-equipped freighter of four thousand tons which had been in the Australian trade and could be fitted for sea at a few days' notice. The transfer of ownership was given no needless publicity. George Huntley attended to that. He had another interview with his friend, the barrister, who hinted at forthcoming events which gravely threatened the peace and welfare of Osmond I and the kingdom of Trinadaro.

O'Shea and Johnny Kent discussed this latest information at supper in the Jolly Mermaid tavern with a platter of fried sole between them.

"'Tis this way," explained O'Shea. "There is no doubt at all that this grand king of ours will figure in the lunacy proceedings that we heard was in the wind. His relatives are getting greedier and more worried every day. And until the matter is decided one way or another they will use every means the law allows to head him off from spending the good money that belongs to him."

"And how can they stop him from scatterin' his coin for these wise and benevolent purposes of his?" demanded the engineer.

"Well, George Huntley says the law will permit them to clap some kind of a restrainin' order on the ship and hold her in the dock with the judges' officers aboard till the proceedings are over. And they can serve the same kind of documents on King

Osmond to prevent his chasing himself beyond the jurisdiction of the court."

"But all this infernal shindy can't be started unless there's proof positive that His Majesty intends to fly the coop, Cap'n Mike."

"Right you are, Johnny, you old sea-lawyer. They can't bother the king until he is actually on board and the ship is cleared, so the barrister lad tells George."

"Then they'll be watchin' the *Tarlinton* like terriers at a rat-hole," exclaimed the engineer.

"No, they won't," cried O'Shea with tremendous earnestness. "Do ye mind how we slipped out of Charleston Harbor in the *Hercules* steamer, bound on the filibusterin' expedition to Honduras? 'Twas a successful stratagem, and it could be done in London River."

"Sure it could," and Johnny Kent chuckled joyously. "And the king needn't know anything about it."

"Of course we will keep it from him if we can," agreed O'Shea. "I will do anything short of murder to keep him happy and undisturbed. And it would upset him terribly to know that he must be smuggled out of England to dodge the rascals that would keep him at home as a suspected lunatic."

"We'd better put George Huntley next to this proposition of ours," suggested Johnny. "He itches to be a red-handed conspirator."

The ship-broker admired the scheme when it was explained to him. Yes, the old *Tyneshire Glen* which

they had so scornfully declined to purchase was still at her moorings, and they were welcome to use her as a dummy, or decoy, or whatever one might choose to call it. O'Shea could pretend to load her, he could send as many people on board as he liked, and put a gang of mechanics at work all over the bally old hooker, said Huntley. If the enemies of King Osmond I took it for granted that the *Tyneshire Glen* was the ship selected to carry him off to Trinidado, that was their own lookout. It was a regular Yankee trick, by Jove!

O'Shea and Johnny Kent took great care to avoid being seen in the vicinity of the *Tarlinton*. Such inspection and supervision as were necessary they contrived to attend to after dark. The king was up to his ears in urgent business and was easily persuaded to leave the whole conduct of the ship's affairs in their capable hands and to waive preliminary visits to the East India Docks.

O'Shea employed a Scotch engineer, who understood that his wages depended on his taciturnity, to oversee such repair work as the *Tarlinton* needed, and to keep steam in the donkey-boilers.

All signs indicated that the *Tarlinton* was preparing for one of her customary voyages to Australia. Soon the cargo began to stream into her hatches. The ostensible destinations of the truck-loads of cases and crates and bales of merchandise were Sydney, Melbourne, Wellington, Fremantle, and so on. One might read the names of the consignees neatly stencilled on every package. This was done

under the eye of Captain O'Shea, who, in his time, had loaded hundreds of boxes of rifles and cartridges innocently labelled "Condensed Milk," "Prime Virginia Hams," and "Farming Tools."

But the place to find roaring, ostentatious activity was on board the old *Tyneshire Glen*. This rusty steamer fairly hummed. Captain O'Shea visited her daily, and Johnny Kent hustled an engine-room crew with loud and bitter words. It appeared as though the ship must be in a great hurry to go to sea. While they were stirring up as much pretended industry as possible, the question of a cargo was not overlooked. It was shoved on board as fast as the longshoremen in the holds could handle it. Nor did these brawny toilers know that all these stout wooden boxes so plainly marked and consigned to Trinadaro "via S.S. *Tyneshire Glen*" contained only bricks, sand, stones, and scrap-iron.

They were part of the theatrical properties of Captain O'Shea, who could readily produce a make-believe cargo for a faked voyage in a steamer which had no intention of leaving port.

The London newspapers showed renewed interest in the schemes and dreams of King Osmond I of Trinadaro. The *Tyneshire Glen* was visited by inquisitive journalists with note-books and cameras. Captain O'Shea welcomed them right courteously, and gave them information, cigars, and excellent whiskey. They returned to their several offices to write breezy columns about the preparations for the singular voyage of the *Tyneshire Glen*. So severe

are the English libel laws that never a hint was printed of the possible legal obstacles which might bring the enterprise to naught. For purposes of publication, King Osmond I was as sane as a trivet unless a judge and jury should officially declare him otherwise.

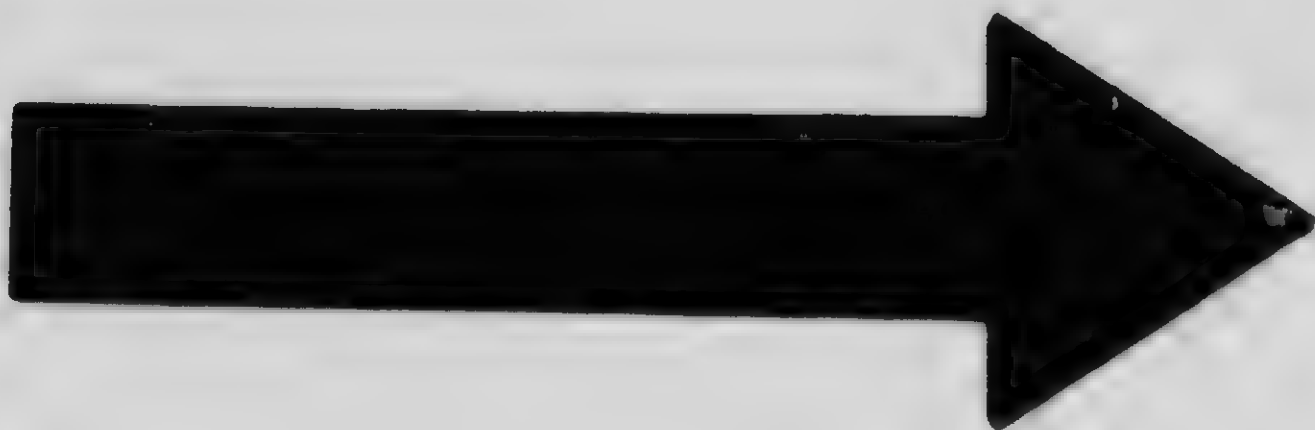
Nevertheless, the intimation had reached the newspaper offices that the relatives of Colonel Sydenham-Leach were likely to take steps to prevent him from leaving England. And reporters were assigned to watch the *Tyneshire Glen* up to the very moment of departure.

Now and then Johnny Kent quietly trundled himself on board the *Tarlinton*, usually after nightfall, and was gratified to find that progress was running smoothly in all departments. So nearly ready for sea was the big cargo-boat that the time had come to devise the final details of the stratagem.

Accordingly, Captain O'Shea went boldly to the custom house, and took out clearance papers not for the *Tarlinton* to Australia, but for the *Tyneshire Glen* to the island of Trinadaro. The chief officer whom he had selected to sail with him held a master's certificate and the ship was cleared in his name.

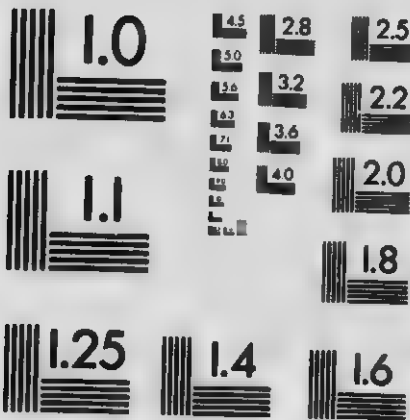
As for the *Tarlinton*, which was really to sail while the *Tyneshire Glen* remained peacefully at her moorings in the East India Docks, O'Shea decided to omit the formality of clearances. As he explained to Johnny Kent:

"The less attention called to the *Tarlinton* the



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better. Once at sea we will hoist the flag of Trinidad over our ship, and His Majesty's government will give her a registry and us our certificates. 'Tis handy to be an independent sovereign with a merchant marine of his own."

The services of an employment agency enabled O'Shea to muster several score bogus colonists or subjects of King Osmond, persons of respectable appearance who were glad to earn ten shillings apiece by marching on board the *Tyneshire Glen* with bags and bundles in their hands. There could be no room for doubt in the public mind that the eccentric, grandiose Colonel Sydenham-Leach was on the point of leaving his native shores with his people and material to found his island principality.

It seemed advisable to Captain O'Shea to take the *Tarlinton* out of the docks late in the afternoon, swing into the river, and anchor until King Osmond should be brought aboard in a tug furnished by George Huntley. There was much less risk of observation in having the royal passenger join the ship after nightfall and away from the populous docks, in addition to which O'Shea preferred to get clear of the cramping stone basins and gates and hold his ship in the fair-way with room for a speedy departure in the event of a stern chase.

He artlessly explained that this arrangement would allow the king to spend several more hours ashore in winding up the final details of his business. The unsuspecting Osmond I approved these plans and had no idea that they were part of an elaborate

conspiracy to smuggle him out of England under cover of darkness.

As a crafty device to throw the enemy off the scent, O'Shea conceived what he viewed as a master-stroke. George Huntley was called into consultation and promptly sent for a superannuated clerk of his office staff who had been pensioned after many years of faithful service. He proved to be a slender, white-haired man who carried himself with a great deal of dignity, and at the first glimpse of him O'Shea exclaimed delightedly:

"You couldn't have done better, George, if you had raked London with a comb. Put a snowy mustache and chin whisker on him and he will pass for King Osmond of Trinadaro with no trouble at all."

"I think we can turn him into a pretty fair counterfeit," grinned Huntley. "And when he walks aboard the *Tyneshire Glen* at dusk and all those bogus subjects at ten shillings each raise a loyal cheer, the hoax will be complete. This is the artistic touch to make the job perfect."

"And what am I to do after that, Mr. Huntley, if you please?" timidly inquired the elderly clerk. "If it's only a practical joke, I don't mind——"

"Play the part, Thompson. Acknowledge the homage of the ship's company and go below at once. Dodge into a state-room. The ship will probably be watched by persons keenly interested in your movements. If they poke a mess of legal documents at you, accept them without argument. The meddle-

some gents will leave you alone after that. They will merely keep close watch of the ship to make sure that you don't run away with her. When you come back to London in the morning, pluck off the false whiskers, and be handsomely rewarded for your exertions. I'll see that you get in no trouble."

"It is a bit queer, Mr. Huntley, but you were always a great hand for a lark," said the clerk. "Thank you, I will do as you say."

The genuine colonists of King Osmond stole on board the *Tarlinton*, singly, and by twos and threes, some before she pulled out of the docks, others by boat after she swung into the stream. At the same time the imitation voyagers from the employment agency were making as much noise and bustle as possible as they trooped on board the *Tyneshire Glen*.

Captain O'Shea intended to convey the king from the hotel to the *Tarlinton*, but at the last moment he was detained to quell a ruction in the forecastle. George Huntley had been unexpectedly summoned to the Hotel Cecil to see an American millionaire who was in a great hurry to charter a yacht. O'Shea therefore sent a message to His Majesty directing him to have his carriage driven to a certain landing on the river-front of the East India Docks, where he would be met by the chief officer of the *Tarlinton* and escorted aboard the ship.

Within the same hour, the dignified, elderly clerk by the name of Thompson might have been seen to enter a carriage close by the Hotel Carleton, and

those standing near heard him tell the driver to go to the steamer *Tyneshire Glen*.

The chief officer of the *Tarlinton*, waiting near an electric light at the landing-pier, abreast of which the steamer was anchored in the stream, felt a weight of responsibility for the safe delivery of King Osmond, and was easier in mind when he saw a carriage halt within a few yards of him. The window framed the kindly features, the white mustache and imperial, which the chief officer instantly identified. Hastening to assist His Majesty from the carriage, he announced apologetically:

"Captain O'Shea sends his compliments and regrets that he is detained on board. The ship is ready as soon as you are."

The king murmured a word or two of thanks. The chief officer carefully assisted him to board the tug, which speedily moved away from the pier and turned to run alongside the *Tarlinton*. The important passenger mounted the steamer's gangway and stood upon the shadowy deck, whose row of lights had been purposely turned off lest his figure might be discernible from shore.

Captain O'Shea was waiting to get the ship under way. It was no time for ceremony. The business of the moment was to head for the open sea, and beyond the reach of the British law and its officers. A few minutes later, Captain O'Shea hastened aft to greet His Majesty and explain his failure to welcome him on board. Meeting the chief officer, he halted to ask:

"Everything all right, Mr. Arbuthnot? Did he ask for me? Did he give you any orders?"

"All satisfactory, sir. The king said he was very tired and would go to his rooms at once."

"I wonder should I disturb him?" said O'Shea to himself, hesitating. "'Tis not etiquette to break into his rest. Well, I will go back to the bridge and wait a bit. Maybe he will be sending for me. My place is with the pilot till the ship has poked her way past Gravesend and is clear of this muck of up-river shipping."

The *Tarlinton* found a less crowded reach of the Thames as she passed below Greenwich and her engines began to shove her along at a rapid gait. She had almost picked up full speed and was fairly headed for blue water when the noise of loud and grievous protests arose from the saloon deck. The commotion was so startling that O'Shea bounded down from the bridge and was confronted by a smooth-shaven, slender, elderly man who flourished a false mustache and imperial in his fist as he indignantly cried:

"I say, this is all wrong as sure as my name is Thompson. I never bargained with Mr. George Huntley to be kidnapped and taken to sea. I don't want to go, I tell you. These people tell me that this steamer is bound to some island or other thousands of miles from here. I stand on my rights as an Englishman. I demand that I be taken back to London at once."

O'Shea glared stupidly at the irate clerk so long

in the employ of Tavistock & Huntley. For once the resourceful shipmaster was utterly taken aback. He managed to say in a sort of quavering stage whisper:

"For the love of heaven, what has become of the real king? Who mislaid him? Where is he now?"

"I don't know and I'm sure I don't care," bitterly returned the affrighted Thompson. "I was an ass to consent to this make-believe job."

"But how did you two kings get mixed?" groaned O'Shea. "You're in the wrong ship. Have ye not sense enough to fathom that much? You were supposed to go aboard the *Tyneshire Glen*, ye old blunderer."

"The man who drove the carriage told me this was the *Tyneshire Glen*. I had to take his word for it. How was I to know one ship from the other in the dark? I was told to pretend I was the genuine king, wasn't I? So I played the part as well as I could."

"Ye played it right up to the hilt. My chief officer will vouch for that," and O'Shea held his head between his hands. He sent for Johnny Kent and briefly announced:

"We are shy one king, Johnny. The deal has been switched on us somehow. Our boss was left behind."

"Great sufferin' Cæsar's ghost, Cap'n Mike!" gasped the other. "Say it slow. Spell it out. Make signs if you're choked up so that you can't talk plain."

"The real king went in the discard, Johnny. We've fetched the dummy to sea. The one that came aboard was the other one."

"Then what in blazes became of our beloved King Osmond the First?" cried Johnny.

"You can search me. Maybe his affectionate relatives have their hooks in him by now and have started him on the road to the brain college."

"It ain't reasonable for us to keep on our course for Trinadaro without the boss," suggested the chief engineer. "This is his ship and cargo."

This was so self-evident that Captain O'Shea answered never a word, but gave orders to let go an anchor and hold the ship in the river until further notice. Then he turned to glower at an excited group of passengers who had mustered at the foot of the bridge ladder and were loudly demanding that he come down and talk to them. They were loyal subjects of the vanished monarch, his secretaries, artisans, foremen, laborers, who ardently desired an explanation. They became more and more insistent and threatened to resort to violence unless the steamer instantly returned to London to find King Osmond.

O'Shea gave them his word that he would not proceed to sea without the missing sovereign, and during a brief lull in the excitement he thrust the bewildered Thompson, the masquerader, into the chart-room and pelted him with questions. The latter was positive that he had directed the cabman to drive to the *Tyneshire Glen*. And the fellow was

particular to stop and ask his way when just inside the entrance to the docks. At least, he had halted his cab to talk to some one who was apparently giving him information. Thompson was unable to overhear the conversation.

"And did ye get a look at this second party?" sharply queried O'Shea.

"The carriage lamp showed me his face for a moment, and I saw him less distinctly as he moved away. He was a young man, well dressed, rather a smart-looking chap, I should say. I think he had on a fancy red waistcoat."

"Sandy complected? A brisk walker?" roared O'Shea in tremendous tones.

"I am inclined to say the description fits the young man," said Thompson.

"'Twas the crooked minister of finance, Baron Frederick Martin Strothers, bad luck to him!" and O'Shea looked blood-thirsty. "I will bet the ship against a cigar that he sold out to the enemy. He stands in with the king's wicked relatives and schemin' lawyers. And we never fooled him for a minute. 'Tis likely he switched the real king to the *Tyneshire Glen*, where the poor monarch would have no friends to help him out of a scrape. Strothers bribed the cabmen—that's how the trick was turned. Just how they got next to our plans I can't fathom at all."

"Then it is hopeless to try to secure the king and transfer him to this steamer?" asked Thompson, easier in mind now that he comprehended that he had not been purposely kidnapped.

"Hopeless? By me sainted grandmother, it is not hopeless at all," cried Captain O'Shea as he fled from the chart-room. Johnny Kent had made another journey from the lower regions to seek enlightenment. O'Shea thumped him between the shoulders and confidently declaimed:

"We're done with all this childish play-acting and stratagems. 'Tis not our kind of game. 'Twas devised to spare the sensitive feeling of King Osmond, and this wide-awake Strothers has made monkeys of us. Now we're going to turn around and steam back to London and grab this genuine king of ours and take him to sea without any more delay at all."

"I like your language," beamingly quoth Johnny Kent. "We're about due to have a little violence, Cap'n Mike."

While the good ship *Tarlington* swings about and retraces her course there is time to discover what befell the genuine Osmond I after he entered a carriage at the Hotel Carleton and set out to join Captain O'Shea's steamer.

He was rapidly driven to the East India Docks and the carriage drew up alongside the *Tyneshire Glen*. The royal occupant had been informed by Captain O'Shea that the ship would be out of the docks by now and a tug waiting to transfer him. In the darkness the shadowy outline of one steamer looked very like another, and King Osmond thought that perhaps the plan of sailing might have been changed at the last moment.

The cabman strenuously assured him that this was the *Tarlington*, and he decided that he had

better go aboard and look for Captain O'Shea. If a mistake had been made, it should be an easy matter to find the landing-pier and the waiting tug.

No sooner had the king reached the deck than he was convinced that he had been directed to the wrong steamer. The people who stared at him were utter strangers. There was not a subject of Trinadaro among them, nor did any of the officers of the ship step forward to greet him. He was about to accost the nearest spectator when an officious man dressed in seedy black confronted him, flourished a formidable-appearing document under the royal nose, and pompously affirmed:

"A writ from the judge duly appointed and authorized by the Lord Chancellor to take cognizance of such cases, distraining Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach from attempting to quit the jurisdiction of said court pending an inquisition *de lunatico inquirendo*. Take it calm and easy, sir. This won't interfere with your liberty as long as you obey the writ."

Another minion of the law, a fat man with a well-oiled voice, thereupon formally took possession of the steamer, explaining that because clearance papers had been issued for a voyage to Trinadaro, the court held that a departure from England was actual and speedily contemplated. The presence of Colonel Sydenham-Leach on board in person was also evidence after the fact.

The blow was staggering, humiliating, incredibly painful. It shook the amiable gentleman's presence

of mind to the very foundations. To be interfered with as an alleged madman was enough to bewilder the most sapient monarch that ever wielded sceptre. As a landed proprietor, a retired officer of the militia, a Conservative in politics, King Osmond had profound respect for the law and the constitution of his native land. He was not one to defy a judicial writ or to grapple with the situation in a high-handed manner. In other words, he was rather Colonel Sydenham-Leach in this cruel crisis than the sovereign ruler of the independent principality of Trinadaro.

No help or comfort was to be obtained from the company around him. These spurious voyagers from the employment agency were whispering uneasily among themselves and regarding the unfortunate Osmond with suspicious glances. They had not bargained to entangle themselves in the affairs of an alleged lunatic on board of a ship which had been seized in the name of the law. Ten shillings was not enough for this sort of thing.

"It don't look right to me," said one of them. "The job is on the queer. I say we hook it before the bloomin' bobbies come and put the lot of us in jail."

This sentiment expressed the general view of the situation, and the counterfeit subjects of Trinadaro began to flock down the gangway and scatter in a hunted manner among the gloomy warehouses. Presently Colonel Sydenham-Leach was left alone with the two court officers. Recovering somewhat

of his composure and dignity, he declared that he must consult with his legal advisers before consenting to leave the ship. He clung to the hope that delay might enable Captain O'Shea to come to his rescue, although he was unwilling to try to send a message to the *Tarlington*. This might reveal to the officers of the law that the wrong ship had been detained, and put them on the track of the right one.

There was no legal reason why the luckless king should not remain in the *Tyneshire Glen* until his lawyers could come and confer with him, wherefore the captors grumblingly sat themselves down in the cabin to wait. The king had nothing to say to them. He was absorbed in his own unhappy reflections. His dreams had turned to ashes. His island empire would know him not. He felt very old and helpless, and sad.

Thus he sat and brooded for some time. At length he heard the sound of men tramping across the deck above his head. He roused himself to look in the direction of the door-way. A moment later it framed the well-knit, active figure of Captain Michael O'Shea. Behind him puffed stout Johnny Kent.

"'Twas a good guess, Your Majesty," cried O'Shea. "We thought you might have gone adrift and fetched up aboard this old steamer. Who are your two friends?"

"Officers from the bench of one of the judges in lunacy," reluctantly admitted King Osmond. "They

have served distraining papers on me and on my ship."

"On this ship?" exclaimed Johnny Kent. "How ridiculous! What'll we do with this pair of bailiffs, or whatever you call 'em, Cap'n Mike? Make 'em eat their documents?"

"No; we will take the two meddlers along with us," sweetly answered O'Shea. "We can't afford to leave them behind to tell how it happened."

"But they have all the power and authority of the British government behind them," spoke up King Osmond.

"And they have a long voyage ahead of them," said O'Shea. "Your Majesty can give them jobs in your own judicial department and they will grow up with the country."

"I cannot countenance such actions," began the king, but Johnny Kent interrupted to remark with much vehemence:

"Excuse us, Your Majesty, but this ain't no time for arguments about the British constitution. Cap'n Mike and me agreed to take you and your ship to Trinadaro. It was a contract, and we propose to earn our wages. If you won't come easy and willin', then we'll just have to call a couple of our men from the boat that's waiting alongside and escort you, anyhow. We aim to live up to our agreements."

O'Shea wasted no more words. Suddenly grasping one of the court officers by the back of the neck and the slack of his garments, he propelled him rapidly toward the deck, fiercely admonishing him to

make no outcry unless he wished to be tossed overboard.

The other man had started to flee, but Johnny Kent caught him in a few heavy strides, tucked him under one mighty arm, clapped a hand over his mouth, and waddled with his burden to the nearest cargo port.

"Drop them into the boat," commanded O'Shea. "Ahoy, there, below! Catch these two lads, and let them make no noise."

The astonished King Osmond had followed the abductors out of the cabin. Before he could renew the discussion Captain O'Shea, breathing hard, but calm and smiling, faced him with the courteous invitation:

"After you, Your Majesty. We are at your service. A few minutes in the boat and you will be aboard the *Tarlinton* and heading for the open sea."

It was obviously so futile to protest that the king meekly descended to the boat, steadied by the helping hand of Johnny Kent. The seamen shoved off and O'Shea steered for the long black hull of the steamer visible a few hundred yards down-stream. Unable to voice his confused emotions, the king suffered himself to be conducted up the gangway of the *Tarlinton*.

His loyal subjects, the real ones, cheered frantically at sight of him. It was an ovation worthy of his station. He bowed and smiled and was himself again. Already the recollection of his detention as a madman seemed less distressing.

He felt the ship tremble under his feet as her engines began to drive her toward the blessed sea and the long road to wave-washed Trinadaro. Had it not been for the bold and ready conduct of his two faithful mariners, he would now be a broken-spirited old man in London, a butt of public ridicule. He went below to the state-rooms which had been suitably fitted for his comfort and privacy, and discovered that he was greatly wearied.

Before retiring he sent one of his secretaries to request Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent to give him the pleasure of their company at breakfast next morning.

"That makes me feel a bit more cheerful," said O'Shea to himself. "Maybe he has decided to forgive us. We were guilty of high treason, disobedience, and a few other things, in packing him off to sea while he was trying to tell us he couldn't go at all."

The *Tarlinton* was in blue water next morning when the captain and the chief engineer bashfully entered the private dining-room of His Majesty. The latter greeted them with marked affability, and said:

"I take great pleasure, my dear friends, in conferring on you the insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro as a recognition of your invaluable loyalty and assistance. You will be entitled to call yourselves barons of my realm by royal warrant. While I must confess that I could not ordinarily approve of such summary methods as you made use of——"

"It looks different now that old England is dropping astern," suggested O'Shea. "The British constitution doesn't loom as big as it did. Your own flag is at the mast-head, Your Majesty, and you can make treaties if ye like. I thank you with all my heart for the reward you have given me."

"It pleases me a heap more to be a member of the nobility of Trinadaro than to earn big wages for the voyage," warmly assented Johnny Kent. "I'll be the only life-size baron in my neck of the woods when I settle down on that farm in the State o' Maine, eh, Cap'n Mike?"

Freed of all anxieties and besetments, the royal passenger resumed his labor of planning the occupations of his subjects. His enthusiasm was delightful to behold. He seemed to grow younger with every day of the voyage southward. His was to be a kingdom of peace and good-will, of a benevolent ruler and a contented, industrious people. He was the staunchest kind of a royalist, and Trinadaro was to be a constitutional monarchy with an aristocracy which should be recruited after the pioneering work had been accomplished.

The relations between the king and his mariners twain became those of pleasant intimacy. They came to know him much better during the long weeks at sea, and felt toward him an affectionate, tolerant respect.

The ship had crossed the equator and was ploughing through the long blue surges of the South Atlantic when Captain O'Shea, after working out the noon observations, informed the king:

"A couple of days more and we'll begin to look for a sight of the peaks of Trinadaro. If the weather holds calm, we can begin to put the people and the cargo ashore right after that."

"The peaks of Trinadaro!" fondly echoed Osmond I. "Do you know, Captain O'Shea, I have wondered if you considered me a crack-brained old fool. Many men in England think so, I am sure. I know that my relatives do."

"'Tis my opinion that ye wish to make folks happy and that you will do no harm with your money," was the reply. "And there's few rich men that can say the same. No; 'tis not crack-brained to want to be a king. Power is what men desire, and they will trample on others to get it. I have heard ye talk here on board ship, and I have admired what you had to say. You will live your own life in your own way, but ye will not forget to make this island of yours a place for men and women to call home and to be glad that they have found it."

"I thank you, Captain O'Shea," said the other. "I cannot help thinking now and then of what will be the fate of my principality when death comes to me. If I am spared for ten or fifteen years longer, I shall have time to set my affairs in order, to make Trinadaro self-sustaining, to win the recognition of foreign governments, to arrange for an administration to succeed my reign."

"May you live to be a king until you are a hundred!" cried O'Shea. "And a man who is as happy and contented as you are is pretty sure of a ripe old age."

"I hope that you and Mr. Kent will consent to sail under my flag as long as I live," earnestly said the king. "I have learned to depend on you, and I need not tell you that the financial arrangement will be more favorable than you could make elsewhere."

"We have no notion of quitting your service," replied O'Shea, with a smile. "'Tis up to us to see the kingdom fairly under way before we turn rovers again."

It was early in the morning of the second day after this when the officer on watch roused Captain O'Shea with the news that land had been sighted on the starboard bow. The master of the *Tarlington* stared through his binoculars and saw a black, jagged foreland of rock lifting from the sea. He sent word to the passengers that Trinadaro lay ahead of them.

King Osmond had left word that he was to be called whenever the first glimpse of his island should be revealed. But he came not to the bridge in response to the message from Captain O'Shea. In his stead appeared his physician, with a demeanor terribly distressed. His voice was unsteady as he said:

"It is my sad duty to inform you that His Majesty passed away some time during the night. His heart simply ceased to beat. It had been somewhat feeble and irregular of late, but the symptoms were not alarming. His strength was overtaxed during those last weeks in London."

O'Shea bared his head and stood silent. The an-

nouncement was very hard to believe. Pulling himself together, he murmured to the chief officer:

"The king is dead. Please set the flag of Trinadaro at half-mast."

As soon as the word was passed down to the engine-room Johnny Kent sought the bridge and his eyes filled with tears as he exclaimed:

"It don't seem right, Cap'n Mike. I ain't reconciled to it one mite. He deserved to have what he wanted."

"Yes, he had slipped his cable, Johnny. There are cruel tricks in this game of life."

"What will you do now?"

"I have had no time to think. But one thing is certain. I will carry King Osmond to his island, and there we will bury him. 'Tis the one place in all the world where he would want to rest. And the peaks of Trinadaro will guard him, and the big breakers will sing anthems for him, and he will be the king there till the Judgment Day."

The *Tarlington* slowly approached the precipitous coast-line and changed her course to pass around to the lee of the island. As the deeply indented shore opened to view, and one bold headland after another slid by, a comparatively sheltered anchorage was disclosed.

There, to the amazement of Captain O'Shea, rode two small cruisers. One of them flew the red ensign of England, the other the green and yellow colors of the navy of Brazil. He guessed their errand before a British lieutenant came alongside the *Tarlington*.

in a steam-launch and climbed the gangway which had been dropped to receive him.

Gazing curiously at the silent company and the half-masted flag of Trinadaro, he was conducted into the saloon, where Captain O'Shea waited for him to state his business.

"This steamer belongs to Colonel Sydenham-Leach, I presume," said the visitor. "I should like to see him, if you please. Sorry, but I have unpleasant news for him."

"If it is King Osmond of Trinadaro ye mean, he is dead, God rest his soul! He went out last night."

"You don't say! Please express my sympathy to the ship's company," exclaimed the lieutenant. "How extraordinary! We received orders by cable at Rio to proceed to Trinadaro in time to intercept this vessel of yours."

"And what were the orders, and why is that Brazilian man-of-war anchored alongside of you?" asked O'Shea.

"It is all about the ownership of the island," the lieutenant explained. "Nobody wanted it for centuries, and now everybody seems keen on getting hold of it. The English government suddenly decided, after you sailed from London, that it might need Trinadaro as a landing-base for a new cable between South America and Africa, and sent us to hoist the flag over the place. Brazil heard of the affair and sent a ship to set up a claim on the basis of an early discovery. The Portuguese have presented their evidence, I believe, because their people made

some kind of a settlement at Trinadaro once upon a time."

"And the forsaken island was totally forgotten until poor King Osmond got himself and his project into the newspapers," slowly commented O'Shea.

"That is the truth of the matter, I fancy." The naval lieutenant paused, and commiseration was strongly reflected in his manly face. "Tell me," said he, "what was the opinion at home about this King of Trinadaro? He was a bit mad, I take it."

"No more than you or me," answered O'Shea. "He had a beautiful dream, and it made him very happy, but it was not his fate to see it come true. And no doubt it is better that he did not live to know that the scheme was ruined. His island has been taken away from him. It will be wrangled over by England and Brazil and the rest of them, and there is no room for a king that hoped to enjoy himself in his own way. The world has no place for a man like Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach, my dear sir."

"Too bad!" sighed the lieutenant. "And what are your plans, Captain O'Shea? Do you intend to make any formal claim in behalf of the late king?"

"No. His dreams died with him. There is no heir to the throne. I'm thankful that his finish was so bright and hopeful. There will be funeral services and burial to-morrow. I should take it as a great favor if detachments from the British cruiser and the Brazilian war-vessel could be present."

"I will attend to it," said the lieutenant.

When the coffin of King Osmond I was carried ashore it was draped with the flag of Trinadaro, which he himself had designed. Launches from the two cruisers towed sailing-cutters filled with blue-jackets, who splashed through the surf and formed in column led by the bugles and the muffled drums. The parade wound along the narrow valleys and climbed to the plateau on which the ruler had planned to build his capital.

There the first and last King of Trinadaro was laid to rest, and the guns of the cruisers thundered a requiem. The British lieutenant counted the guns and turned to Captain O'Shea to say:

"It is the salute given only to royalty, according to the navy regulations. It is the least we can do for him."

"And it is handsomely done," muttered the grateful O'Shea as he brushed his hand across his eyes.

"Will you take your ship back to England?"

"Yes. I can do nothing else. 'Twill be a sad voyage, but God knows best. As it all turned out, this king of ours had to die to win his kingdom."

When the mourners had returned to the *Tarlington*, Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent went into the chart-room and talked together for some time. At length the simple-hearted chief engineer said with a wistful smile:

"I'm glad we stood by and did what we could for him, ain't you, Cap'n Mike?"

"You bet I am, Johnny. He was a good man, and I loved him. Here's to His Majesty, King Osmond

of Trinadaro! Even the pair of court officers we kidnapped had come to be fond of him and wished him no harm. There may be trouble waiting for us in London River on account of them and the ship that took out no clearances. But we will face the music. 'Tis not much to do for him that was so good to us."

"Right you are, Cap'n Mike; but do you suppose we'll go to jail?"

"No; for the blame will be laid to poor King Osmond, and the law will hold him responsible for the acts of his agents. But we would not mind going to jail for him."

"Well, anyhow, they can never take his kingdom away from him," softly quoth Johnny Kent.

THE LINER "ALSATIAN"

FIFTEEN years ago the crack Atlantic liners were no larger than ten thousand tons. Some of them are still in service, safe and comfortable ships, quite fast enough for the traveller who is not bitten with speed madness. When the *Alsatian* of the International Line was new she attracted as much attention as one of the monsters of to-day with its length of almost a fifth of a mile and horse-power to stagger the imagination.

As she rode at anchor in the Mersey on a certain sailing day in March, spick-and-span with fresh paint, brasswork sparkling in the sunshine, flags snapping in the breeze, the *Alsatian* was a handsome picture to greet the passengers who arrived in the special train from London and were transferred on board in the paddle-wheel tender. There were fewer than a hundred of them in the first cabin, for the season of the year was between high tides of travel east and west.

It was a tradition of the International Line that its steamers should sail precisely on the stroke of the hour appointed. More than five minutes' delay was viewed by the port superintendents in Liverpool and New York as a nautical crime. Therefore

when noon came and there was none of the activity of departure, the passengers were curious. A loquacious young man, of the noisy breed which makes the English say unkind things about American tourists, ordered another cocktail of the smoking-room steward and pettishly exclaimed:

"This right-on-the-minute business is all a bluff. The gangway hasn't been hoisted and the tender is still alongside. This ship is nowhere near ready to start. Slow country—slow people, these Britishers. We can show 'em a few things, bet your life."

A nervous, thin-faced gentleman who had been fidgeting between the deck and the smoking-room door chimed in to say:

"Confound it, I hate to be behind time! I can't stand it! What's the matter with this steamer? Why don't the officers tell us something?"

Several passengers listened deferentially to this jerky protest. The speaker was immensely, notoriously rich, and, although dyspepsia had played hob with his internal workings, and his temper was chronically on edge, he was an enviable personage in the eyes of many American citizens. Whether he toiled or loafed, his millions were working night and day to earn more millions for him. It could make no essential difference under heaven at what hour the *Alsatian* should carry him out of Liverpool, for he could not be happy anywhere; but the delay made him acutely miserable.

An old man with kindly, scrutinizing eyes laid down his cigar to comment:

"My dear sir, I crossed the ocean in a sailing-packet some forty-odd years ago, and we anchored in the channel two weeks waiting for a fair wind, and were fifty-seven days to Sandy Hook."

"Times have changed, thank God!" snapped the great Jenkins P. Chase, of the bankrupt digestion.

"And changed not altogether for the better when it comes to all this fuss and clatter to get somewhere else in a hurry, my friend. It is a national disease," was the smiling, tolerant reply.

Jenkins P. Chase glanced at his watch, muttered something, and darted on deck as if a bee had stung him.

"Bet you the drinks he's gone to find the captain and blow him up," admiringly cried the loquacious young man. "If Jenkins P. Chase gets his dander up he's liable to buy the ship and the whole blamed line and run it to suit himself. He is the original live-wire. Most wonderful man in the little old United States."

In a rather secluded corner of the smoking-room sat two passengers who had taken no part in the general conversation. One might have suspected that all this fuss over a belated sailing caused them mild amusement. The younger was of a cast of features unmistakably Irish, with the combination of pugnacity and humor so often discernible in men of that blood.

His companion was ruddy and big-bodied, his hair and mustache well frosted by time. Said the latter, after due reflection:

"Hurry has killed a whole lot of people, Cap'n Mike. What's the matter with these peevish gents, anyhow? The company is givin' them their board and they're as comfortable as lords. I don't care if the steamer lays in port a week."

"That Jenkins P. Chase is a horrible example, Johnny," quoth Captain Michael O'Shea. "'Tis his habit to go flyin' about, and there is no rest for him anywhere. If ye accumulate too much money, you may get that way yourself."

"I ain't got a symptom," said improvident old Johnny Kent. "I've learned, for one thing, that it's poor business to try to hurry the sea. A ship must bide her time and sail when she's ready."

"But what ails this one, I wonder?" queried Captain O'Shea. "I mistrust something is wrong. The skipper of her, and a grand man he is, with his gold buttons and all, he went below a while ago, Johnny, and he has not come back."

They strolled outside, and being seafaring men of wide experience, found significance in trifles which would have meant little or nothing to a landsman. This was no ordinary delay. The whole complex organization of the liner was disturbed.

"There is trouble amongst the crew," observed O'Shea. Johnny Kent halted near an engine-room skylight and cocked his head to listen.

"The trouble is in this department," said he.

Presently a tug-boat hastily cast off from the nearest quay and churned her way out to the *Alsatian*. A dozen Liverpool policemen scrambled

aboard the liner and vanished between-decks. From the depths below the water-line arose a hubbub of oaths and shouts.

A few minutes later two policemen reappeared dragging between them to the gangway a shock-headed, muscular fellow in blue dungarees. Although he made no resistance, they handled him roughly and he was expeditiously handcuffed to a stanchion on the deck of the tug. Immediately thereafter the sounds of disturbance down below increased in violence, and swarming up ladders and through passageways came a sooty, greasy crowd of stokers, trimmers, and coal-passers.

Scrambling on board the tug, and taking her by storm, they voiced their opinions of the *Alsatian* and the International Line in language which caused the feminine passengers to clap their hands to their ears and flee from the rail.

A junior officer with whom Captain O'Shea had scraped acquaintance halted to explain, in passing:

"The blackguards went on strike for more pay and recognition of their union. The company patched up the trouble yesterday, but the beggars were stirred up again this morning by the chap the bobbies put the irons on. He persuaded them to kick up a rumpus just before sailing-time."

"If they have signed articles, 'tis more like a mutiny than a strike," observed O'Shea.

"They know that right enough," said the officer, "but they don't seem to care whether they are jugged for it or not. It's an incident of the general

labor trouble in this port, I presume. The long-shoremen's strike is not settled yet, you know."

"And what will ye do for a fire-room gang?" O'Shea asked him. "There was near a hundred and fifty of them that quit just now."

"Hanged if I know," sighed the officer as he walked away.

The tug was black with the mob of strikers, who were packed wherever they could find standing-room. The police could do nothing with them, and the distracted skipper of the tug decided to make for a quay and get rid of his riotous cargo. The passengers of the *Alsatian* surmised that sailing-day might be indefinitely postponed and they bombarded the officers with excited demands for information. Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent, philosophers of sorts, viewed the situation with good-natured composure, and were more interested in the summons to the dining-saloon for luncheon than in the strike of the fire-room gang.

"As long as I get three square meals per day and a dry bunk I ain't especially uneasy about anything," remarked Johnny Kent as he fondly scanned the elaborate menu card.

"Same here," replied O'Shea. "But that jumpy gentleman, Jenkins P. Chase, must be throwing assorted fits by this time."

Facing them across the table was a blond, spectacled man with a small, pointed beard, his appearance notably studious and precise. Although he spoke English with cultivated ease and fluency, the

ear detected certain shades and intonations to indicate that he was a German by birth. He was affable to his neighbors at table and courteous to the steward who waited on him. Garrulous, sociable Johnny Kent found him companionable, and ventured to inquire:

"Your first trip to America? Business or pleasure?"

"Both. I shall interest myself in studying scientific education in the United States. I am a chemist by profession, and also a lecturer on the subject before the classes of a university. Yes, it is my first voyage to your wonderful country. Tell me, please, have you met the famous Professor Crittenden, of Baltimore?"

Johnny Kent was about to proclaim that as a seafaring man he was not in touch with scientists, but O'Shea, to prevent any such disclosure, kicked him on the shin as a reminder that he was to eschew personalities. It was not discreet to advertise themselves and their affairs in the mixed company of the Atlantic liner. O'Shea was aware that if Johnny Kent should once begin yarning about his adventures it would be like pulling the cork from an overturned jug.

The marine engineer blushed guiltily, bent over to rub his bruised shin, and briefly assured the blond scientist that he had not been lucky enough to meet the distinguished Professor Crittenden, of Baltimore.

"I was only last night reading his masterly paper

on 'The Action of Diazobenzene Sulphonic Acid on Thymine, Uracil, and Cytosine,' " politely returned the other. "It is as brilliant as his discussion of imidechlorides."

Johnny Kent threw up an arm as if to ward off a blow.

"If one of those words had hit me plumb and square, it would have jolted me out of my chair!" he exclaimed. "I could feel the wind of 'em."

The studious stranger smiled and apologized for talking shop.

"Those strikers—will the company be able to fill their places?" said he, addressing O'Shea.

"Perhaps a crew can be scraped up ashore. If not, we will have to shift to another steamer. Firemen are an ugly, cross-tempered lot to handle, so I am told."

"Have you been much on the ocean? Do you know much about ships?"

"I have made a voyage or two as a passenger," O'Shea assured him. "'Tis a hard life in the stoke-hole of a big steamer, I imagine."

The scientist returned emphatically:

"I have no sympathy with them; none whatever. Lacking intelligence, fitness, they must labor for those who have earned or won the right to rule them."

"'Tis your opinion that might makes right?" spoke up O'Shea.

"Always, everywhere!" declared the scientist. "The mind is the man. The founders of your

government proclaimed the fallacy that all men are equal, but your strong men know better, and they rule and exploit your masses."

"It's the best country God ever made," cried Johnny Kent with some heat.

"I beg your pardon"; and the chemist bowed. "It was a rudeness for me to speak so."

As they left the table he gave them his card with a touch of formality, and they discovered that his name was Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz.

Three hours later the passengers were notified that the *Alsatian* would be ready to sail next morning. It was learned that the company had been able to recruit an unexpectedly large number of unemployed firemen among the boarding-houses and taverns of the Liverpool water-front. They were willing to take the places of the strikers, and it was hoped that the liner could be sent to sea with a fairly complete complement of men. Apparently the strikers had been poorly advised and led, for they were beaten with no great inconvenience to the management of the company.

As soon as the *Alsatian* had lifted anchor and was steaming out of the Mersey the passengers ceased grumbling, and settled into the comfortable, somnolent routine of a modern transatlantic voyage. A party of poker-players mobilized in the smoking-room. The ladies reclined all in a row in their steamer-chairs on the lee side of the deck, like so many shawl-wrapped mummies. The spoiled American child whanged the life out of the long-suffering

piano in the music-room. A few conscientious persons undertook to walk so many miles around the deck each day. There was much random conversation, a spice of flirtation, and a vast deal of eating and sleeping. That hectoring gentleman Jenkins P. Chase spent most of the time in his own rooms, where he was ministered to by his physician, his secretary, and his valet.

Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent enjoyed the luxury of such a voyage as this. There was no responsibility to burden them on the bridge or in the engine-room. No one guessed that they were uncommonly capable mariners, accustomed to command. Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz seemed to find their company congenial, and tried to make them talk about themselves. His curiosity was politely dissembled, but O'Shea took note of it and built up an elaborate fiction to the effect that he was a pavement contractor in New York with friends at Tammany Hall, while Johnny Kent found genuine satisfaction in posing as a retired farmer from the State of Maine. It occurred to O'Shea to remark to his comrade as they were undressing in their room on the second night at sea:

"The chemical professor suspects we are not what we seem. And he is anxious to fathom us."

"Oh, pooh! He's one of them high and lofty thinkers that wouldn't bother his head about ignorant, every-day cusses like us," sleepily replied Johnny Kent as he kicked off his shoes.

"You fool yourself," and O'Shea spoke with de-

cision. "He is full of big words and things that I do not pretend to understand at all, but he is not wrapped up in them entirely, like most of the professors and such. There is a pair of keen eyes behind those gold-rimmed spectacles of his, Johnny, and he is not missing anything that goes on."

"I take notice that he ain't overlookin' that handsome school-teacher that's been studyin' abroad for a year. His eyes are sharp enough to sight her whenever she comes on deck. And she ain't hostile to him, either."

"I grant ye that, you sentimental old pirate," said O'Shea, "but I am not a match-maker, and 'tis no concern of mine. What I am wondering is whether the man is really a university professor bent on 'investigating the scientific education of the United States.'"

"You're welcome to sit up and hatch mysteries by yourself," grumbled the other. "I want to go to sleep. What's the clew to all this, Cap'n Mike? What makes you so darned suspicious?"

"'Tis no more than a hunch, Johnny. I'm Irish, and my people feel things in the air. We don't have to be told. This Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz does not ring true. There is a flaw in him somewhere."

"Well, we're sort of travellers in disguise ourselves, ain't we, Cap'n Mike? I feel plumb full of false pretences. The pot calls the kettle black. How about that?"

"'Tis our own business," snapped O'Shea.

"So is his," briefly concluded Johnny Kent as he crawled into the bunk. No more than five minutes later he was snoring with the rhythm and volume of a whistling buoy in a swinging sea. O'Shea lay awake for some time, trying to fit his uneasy surmises together, or to toss them aside as so much rubbish. He had not heard the banshee cry, but a vague conjecture had fastened itself in his mind that something was fated to go wrong with this voyage of the *Alsatian*. And without tangible cause or reason, he found this foreboding interwoven with the presence on board of the affable, mild-mannered, studious Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz.

Sailors are notably superstitious, and O'Shea had been schooled to beware of cross-eyed Finns in the forecastle and black cats in the cabin. But surely no tradition of the sea held it an ill omen to have on board a blond scientist with gold-rimmed spectacles and a well-cut beard who was seeking information among the technical schools and universities of the United States.

"He has it in his head that Johnny Kent and I are seafarin' men by trade, and he wants to make sure of it for some reason of his own," reflected O'Shea. "It has strained me imagination to lie to him and get away with it. As for Johnny, he would rather talk farming than anything else in the world, so he will pass for a genuine hayseed in any company."

They were deprived of the pleasant society of Professor Vonderholtz next day, for he boldly mo-

nopolized the school-teacher, Miss Jenness, who seemed not in the least bored by his assiduous attentions. Elderly ladies watched them with open interest, and diagnosed it as one of those swift and absorbing steamship romances.

For three days out of Liverpool the *Alsatian* moved uneventfully over the face of the waters. The weather was bright, the sea smooth. The scratch crew of firemen toiled faithfully in the torrid caverns far below, and the mighty engines throbbed unceasingly to whirl the twin screws that pushed the foaming miles astern. On the bridge the captain and his officers went cheerfully about their tasks, thankful for clear skies and a good day's run.

It was after midnight, and the *Alsatian* was in mid-ocean, when a few of the first-cabin passengers heard what sounded to their drowsy ears like several pistol shots. There are many noises aboard a steamship that are unfamiliar to the landsman. Excepting Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent, such of the passengers as had been awakened paid so little heed to the sounds that they soon went to sleep again.

The two seafarers slumbered lightly, as is the habit of men used to turning out to stand watch. And they were not likely to mistake the report of a revolver for any sound to be expected in the routine of things on shipboard. O'Shea leaned over from the upper berth and asked in low tones:

"Are ye awake, Johnny?"

"... I am. Did you hear the rumpus?"

"Yes. At first I thought I was dreaming we were aboard the old *Fearless* with Jiminez, the big black nigger from Venezuela, taking pot shots at me. What did ye make of it? It sounded like pretty lively gun-play to me."

"It wasn't no ordinary sailors' fracas," hoarsely whispered Johnny Kent. "Several of those shots was fired for'ard, and others came from below, about amidships. We heard 'em through the bulk-heads."

"And there was some running to and fro on deck," said O'Shea, "by men with no shoes on. I heard their bare feet slapping the planks over me head."

"We haven't been boarded by pirates, and, anyhow, pirates are out of date in the Atlantic trade, Cap'n Mike. The ship hasn't stopped. It would have waked me in a jiffy if her engines had quit poundin' along, even for a minute."

"I thought I heard yells, faint and far away, from men in trouble, but 'tis all quiet now, Johnny."

"Too darn quiet. The vessel has slowed down a trifle, by six or eight revolutions, but she's joggin' along all serene. Shall we take a turn on deck and look around?"

They moved quietly into the long passageway which led to the main saloon staircase. Ascending this, they crossed the large lounging-hall to the nearest exit to the promenade deck. As was customary, the heavy storm-door had been closed for the night. It was never locked in good weather,

however, and O'Shea turned the brass knob to thrust it open. The door withstood his effort, and he put his shoulder against it in vain.

"'Tis fastened on the outside," he muttered to Johnny Kent. "We are cooped up, and for what?"

"Try the door on the starboard side of the hall," suggested the engineer. "Maybe this one got jammed accidental."

They crossed the hall and hammered against the other door with no better success. The situation disturbed them. They gazed at each other in silence. O'Shea went to one of the bull's-eye windows and peered outside. The steamer was snoring steadily through the quiet sea, and he could discern the crests of the waves as they broke, flashed white, and slid past. The electric lights on deck had been extinguished, but presently a figure passed rapidly and was visible for an instant in the shaft of light from one of the saloon passageways. O'Shea had a glimpse of the blue uniform and gilt braid of a ship's officer.

"I wish I could ask him a question or two," said O'Shea. "Let us try to break out somewhere else. Now that we seem to be locked in, I am obstinate enough to keep on trying."

They made a tour of the halls, bulkhead passages, and alleys, seeking every place of egress from the first-class quarters. Every door had been closed and fastened from the other side. A steward was supposed to be on watch to answer the electric bells in the state-rooms, but he could not be found.

There was no one to interview, no way of gaining information.

The cabin superstructure and partition walls were of steel. The brass-bound ports or windows were too small for a grown man to wriggle through. The passengers were as effectually confined within their own part of the ship as if they had been locked in a penitentiary. There was no means of communicating with the ship's officers.

It seemed useless to awaken the other passengers and inform them of this singular discovery. There would be nothing but confusion, futile argument, and excitement.

"Maybe the skipper decided to lock us in every night," hopefully suggested Johnny Kent. "If some addle-headed gent with a habit of walkin' in his sleep should prance overboard, the company might be liable for heavy damages."

"Nonsense! There are strange doings aboard this fine, elegant steamer," sharply returned O'Shea. "'Tis too big for me. We will roll into our bunks till morning. I will lose me sleep for no man."

When Johnny Kent awoke blinking and yawning, Captain O'Shea was standing in front of the open port through which the morning wind gushed cool and sweet. The sun had lifted above the horizon and the sea was bathed in rosy radiance. The aspect of the sunrise seemed to fascinate Captain O'Shea, but his emotion was rather amazement than admiration. With a strong ejaculation he whirled about to shout at his comrade:

"Do ye notice it, you sleepy old grampus? Does it look wrong to you?"

O'Shea was dancing with excitement as he turned again to stare at the cloudless sun and smiling sea. Johnny Kent thought to humor him and amiably murmured:

"She always comes up in the mornin' regular as a clock, Cap'n Mike, and I guess she always will. Ain't she on time, or what's the matter with her?"

"The sun is where it belongs," cried O'Shea, "but this ship is not. Her course has been shifted during the night. Man, we are not on the great circle course to New York at all. The steamer has gone mad. We are running due south to fetch to the west'ard of the Azores."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the engineer. "That sounds perfectly ridiculous. I guess I'd better put on my breeches and take a promenade. I wonder do we get any breakfast in this crazy packet?"

The first passenger encountered was Jenkins P. Chase, whose morning task it was to walk briskly around the deck, by order of his physician, before the other voyagers were astir. His steward had failed to appear with the dry toast and coffee required to fortify his system for this healthful exercise, and he was in a savage temper as he sputtered at O'Shea:

"What infernal nonsense is this? I can't find a steward or an officer. The service is rotten, it's positively damnable. And I can't go on deck.

Every door is locked. I'll make it hot for the captain."

"'Tis my advice to sit tight and take it easy, Mr. Chase," soothingly returned O'Shea. "I am afraid the captain has troubles of his own this morning."

"What do you mean? What do you know about it? Who the devil are you? Do you think I have no influence with the management of this miserable steamship company?"

"'Tis a long, wet walk from here to the company's offices," said O'Shea with an amused smile. "You are a tremendous man ashore, no doubt. I have read about ye in the newspapers. But unless I guess wrong, you will take your medicine with the rest of us."

Mr. Jenkins P. Chase bolted down the staircase into the spacious dining-saloon. For lack of anything better to do, O'Shea and Johnny Kent followed him. The tables had been set overnight, but at this hour of the morning stewards should have been wiping down paint, cleaning brasswork, or getting ready to serve breakfast. The room was silent and deserted.

Jenkins P. Chase halted abruptly and his hands went out in a nervous, puzzled gesture. O'Shea brushed past him and advanced along an aisle between the tables to the galley or kitchen doors at the farther end of the saloon. These, too, were locked, but he could hear the rattle of pans and pots and a sound of voices, as if the cooks had begun the day's work.

"That is the first cheerful symptom," he said to himself. "The news will put heart into Johnny Kent, though I wish there were more indications of circulatin' the grub among the passengers."

The dictatorial manner of Jenkins P. Chase had become oddly subdued.

"You said we must take our medicine?" he remarked to O'Shea. "For God's sake, what is wrong with this ship?"

"I know very little, my dear man. We were locked in during the night, clapped under hatches, as the saying is. And the course of the vessel was altered to head her for the South Atlantic instead of the Newfoundland Banks."

"But nothing of the sort could possibly happen on a steamer like the *Alsatian*," protested Mr. Chase. "I mean to say there could be no blood-and-thunder business on an Atlantic liner."

"A lot of things have happened at sea that were perfectly impossible," gravely spoke Johnny Kent.

As if the mystery had communicated itself in some subtle, telepathic fashion, the passengers began to appear from their state-rooms at an earlier hour than usual. Unable to go on deck, they congregated in the halls, the library, and the parlor. Rumor spread swiftly and intense uneasiness pervaded the company. For some inscrutable reason they had been made prisoners. This much was evident. The realization inspired a feeling akin to panic. Angry denunciation, with not a solitary member of the ship's crew discoverable, sounded rather foolish.

The men loudest in airing their opinions soon subsided and eyed one another in a mood of glum bewilderment. One or two women laughed hysterically.

Captain O'Shea looked about to find that friendly scientist Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz, who was usually ready with a cordial morning greeting. He was not among the assembled passengers. Presumably he was still in his state-room. A few minutes after this O'Shea found occasion to stroll past the professor's door, which stood open. The room was empty.

Inexplicably, persistently, the personality of the blond scientist had linked itself with O'Shea's strange sense of foreboding. He decided to investigate the empty state-room, for he observed at once that the bedding had not been disarranged in either berth.

"Nobody slept in here last night," said O'Shea to himself.

The room contained no luggage, and no personal effects excepting several articles of discarded clothing. O'Shea picked up a coat and examined it curiously. The pockets were empty, but he made an interesting discovery. The label stitched inside the collar bore the name of a well-known ready-made clothing firm of Broadway, New York.

"And he told us it was his first trip to our wonderful country," was O'Shea's comment. "As a liar he has me beaten both ways from the jack."

He resumed his careful investigation of the room,

and was rewarded by discovering a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on the floor beneath the lower berth, where they must have been purposely tossed aside. It was reasonable to conclude that the owner had no more use for them.

"The bird has flown," soliloquized O'Shea, gazing hard at the spectacles and handling them rather gingerly, as if they might be bewitched. "He couldn't fly overboard. Anyhow, he didn't. I'll bet me head on that. And he has not eloped with the black-eyed school-teacher, for I saw her in the library just now. And where would they elope to? He must be still in the ship."

In a very thoughtful mood he returned to the main staircase, where Johnny Kent was hopefully peering in the direction of the dining-saloon.

"There's something doin' down there," announced the engineer. "The doors were shut and bolted from the inside a few minutes ago. Maybe they'll open again pretty soon and the bell will ring for grub."

"Forget that awful appetite and listen to me," exclaimed O'Shea. "The professor has vanished entirely."

"Committed suicide, you suppose? If he really fell in love with the school-teacher, it's not unlikely, Cap'n Mike. It takes 'em that way sometimes. I've felt like it myself once or twice."

"If he jumped overboard, he took his baggage with him. And he had a couple of hand-bags when he came on board, for I saw them. 'Tis more likely

the divil flew away with him. Here's his spectacles. He left them behind. I tell ye, Johnny Kent, and you may laugh at me all ye like, for you are a much older man than me, and you ought to be wiser, which you are not—that chemical gentleman was not as mild and nice as he made out. His eye was bad. And he has brought trouble to this ship. Where is he now? Can ye answer that?"

"One of those revolver bullets may have perforated him while he was strollin' on deck and figurin' out some new problems in chemistry."

"Your language is a clean waste of words," admonished O'Shea. "'Tis me rash intention to interview the school-teacher, Miss Jenness. She knows more about the professor than the rest of us. This is no joke of a predicament we are in, ye can take my word for it."

Miss Jenness was to be discerned, at a casual glance, as a young woman with a mind of her own. The bold O'Shea approached her timidly, his courage oozing. Her black eyes surveyed him coldly and critically and made him feel as though his feet were several sizes too large.

"I beg pardon," he stammered, "but have ye heard that the professor is missing?"

Surprise and alarm drove the color from her face. Evidently the tidings came as a shock to her. Her perturbation failed wholly to convince O'Shea that she could furnish no clew to the mystery. One question should have leaped swiftly to her lips. It was the one question to ask. Was it supposed that

Professor Vonderholtz had committed suicide by leaping overboard? Captain O'Shea waited for her to say something of the sort. She sat pale and silent. The dark, handsome, matured young woman baffled him. He felt that he was no match for her.

"'Tis not a case of suicide, Miss Jenness," said he.

"Then what is it, may I ask?" she replied in even tones.

O'Shea sat down beside her and spoke in the caressing, blarneying way which he had used to advantage in his time.

"As the most charming girl in the ship, 'twas quite natural for the professor to be nice to you, Miss Jenness. He is a man of taste and intelligence. Now 'tis apparent that something most extraordinary has happened aboard this liner. She is being navigated to parts unknown, and we are helpless to prevent it. 'Tis a wholesale abduction, as ye might say. Professor Vonderholtz disappears at the same time, bag and baggage, leaving his gold spectacles as a souvenir. What do you know about him, if you please? Did he drop any hints to you?"

The girl bit her lip and strove to hide an agitation which made her hands tremble so that she locked them in her lap.

"What should I know about him?" she demanded with a sudden blaze of anger, as if resenting the questions as grossly impertinent. "Why do you come to me? As a travelling acquaintance, Professor Vonderholtz did not take me into his confidence. Are you sure he is not in the steamer?"

"I am quite sure he is still in the steamer, Miss Jenness. For my part, I wish he was overboard," grimly answered O'Shea.

"Then why all this commotion about him?" she asked.

"Are you sure he gave you no impression that he was not a university professor at all, but another kind of man entirely?" stubbornly pursued O'Shea.

"I did not discuss his profession. Chemistry does not interest me," was her icily dignified answer. "If you must know, we talked about books we had read and places we had visited. Professor Vonderholtz is delightfully cosmopolitan and knows how to make himself interesting."

"I am not making much headway with you," sighed O'Shea. "Never mind. It will astonish ye, no doubt, and you will be very angry if I make a guess that you and Professor Vonderholtz knew each other before you met on the deck of the *Alsatian*. And 'tis more than a casual acquaintance that exists between you. You are taken all aback to hear the news that he cannot be found this morning. I grant ye that, but you know more about him than ye will tell me. I have said me say, Miss Jenness."

She paid no heed to him, but rose abruptly and walked in the direction of her state-room. O'Shea watched her until she vanished, and then he murmured with an air of chagrin:

"I may be a pretty fair shipmaster, but as a detective ye can mark me down as a failure. 'Twas a random shot about their knowing each other ashore,

though I have a notion it landed somewhere near the bull's-eye."

Johnny Kent was still posted within strategic distance of the dining-saloon entrance.

"What luck, Cap'n Mike?" he asked.

"Divil a bit."

"Women move in mysterious ways. I can't handle 'em myself. Say, are we goin' to stay cooped up in these cabins like a flock of sick chickens? I ain't reconciled and I don't intend to stand for it."

"No more do I, Johnny. As the only two seafarin' men among all these landlubbers, 'tis up to us to twist the tail of this situation."

"It surely ain't right for us to knuckle under, Cap'n Mike, without putting up an almighty stiff argument. We've fought our way out of some pretty tight corners."

From the dining-room entrance came the noise of the heavy bulkhead doors sliding on their bearings. Johnny Kent shouted joyfully and lumbered down the staircase. A moment later he was bellowing to the other passengers:

"Grub's on the table. Come along and help yourselves. The worst is over."

The hungry company hastened down and jostled through the doorway to the tables, upon which had been set dishes of oatmeal, potatoes, ham and eggs, and pots of coffee. The galley and pantry doors were still closed. Not a steward was visible. The passengers must help themselves. They could eat this simple fare or leave it alone.

The dining-saloon seemed empty, uncanny. Except for the steady vibration of the engines, it was as though the ship had been deserted by her crew. Such talk as went on was in low tones. There was in the air a feeling that hostile influences, unseen, unheard, but very menacing, were all around them. They ate to satisfy hunger, glancing often at the empty chairs of the commander and the chief officer of the *Alsatian*. O'Shea was more interested in the vacant chair of Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz.

A few people carried trays and plates of food to their rooms, as if to make sure of the next meal. Palpitant uncertainty and dread were the emotions common to all. And during this time the *Alsatian* was steaming over the smooth sea, her bow pointing almost due south, her altered course veering farther and farther away from the transatlantic trade routes into a region of ocean mostly frequented by sailing-vessels and wandering tramp freighters. As Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent returned to the upper hall the latter said with a great, resonant laugh:

"Breakfast has made a new man of me. I ain't worried a mite about anything. My gun is in my pants pocket, and I'm pretty spry and sudden for an old codger. What's the orders, Cap'n Mike?"

"There are some good men among the passengers, Johnny, but we will have to show them what to do. 'Tis time that the two of us held a council of war."

They made a slow, painstaking tour of the first-cabin quarters and convinced themselves that every

exit from the steel deck-houses was still securely fastened. Then they sought every window port which commanded a view of the upper decks or superstructures of the ship. They were unable to catch a glimpse, from any angle, of the canvas-screened bridge or to discover whether the captain and the navigating officers were on duty as usual. Upon the forward part of the ship they descried several seamen at work. Down below the rumble of an ash-hoist was heard. The essential business of the ship was going on without interruption.

"One trifle ye will note," said O'Shea. "The decks were not washed down this morning."

"The vessel looks slack, come to look at her close," replied Johnny Kent. "A gang of sailors was paintin' the boats and awning-stanchions yesterday, but they've knocked off."

"'Tis curious how the passengers of a big steamer can be cut off from what is going on," observed O'Shea. "I never realized how easy it was. And there's no choppin' a way out of these steel houses."

"If we do get out, Cap'n Mike, what in blazes are we apt to run into?" the engineer exclaimed, rumpling his mop of gray hair with both hands. "Whoever it was that done the fancy pistol-shootin' last night ain't likely to hesitate to do it again. And there's only two of us with guns unless a few of the passengers happen to have 'em in their valises."

"I will be ashamed of myself and disgusted with you if we don't mix things up before this time to-

morrow, ye fat old reprobate," severely spake Captain Michael O'Shea, and the words were weighed with finality. "The Lord gave us brains, didn't He? If we let ourselves be run away with aboard this floating hotel we ought to beg admittance to the nearest home for aged and decrepit seafarin' men."

"It's a perfectly ridiculous situation to be ketched in, as I said before, Cap'n Mike."

II

THE passengers so mysteriously imprisoned in the first-cabin quarters were soon to meet again that vanished scientist and fellow-voyager Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz. Shortly before noon one of the doors which had blocked exit to the promenade-deck was opened from the outside. An alert, blond man stepped upon the brass threshold and stood gazing at the huddled, wondering passengers. The expression of his keenly intelligent face reflected easy confidence and half-smiling contempt.

He wore the blue uniform cap and blouse of a ship's officer, obviously purloined from the lawful owner, for the insignia was that of the International Line. The gold-rimmed spectacles and the precise, studious manner discarded, it was painfully apparent that he was something very different from a harmless professor of chemistry.

Behind him, and filling the doorway, stood four

other men in the grimy garments of the stoke-hole. The smears of coal-dust which blackened their features gave them a forbidding, sinister appearance. They were openly armed with revolvers. Their leader motioned them to remain where they were. He moved just inside the hall and addressed the passengers in his clean-cut English with its Teutonic shades and intonations. The audience was flatteringly attentive. The sight of the four grim stokers in the background compelled absorbed attention.

"This steamer is in my control," crisply began the singularly transformed university professor. "It is useless for you to wax indignant, to weep, to protest. The thing has been most carefully planned. I will explain a little in order that you may know why it is best for you to do as you are ordered. The strike of those firemen in Liverpool? It was fomented by my agents. They caused the strike to occur on the day of sailing. It was necessary to get rid of that crew of firemen. In their places were shipped my own—our own men. The company was surprised to find a new crew so easily. The stupid management suspected nothing. Many months, much money it had taken to select these men of mine, to have them all together in Liverpool prepared for the opportunity."

The vanity of the man showed itself in this frank praise of his own adroit and masterly leadership. His ego could not help asserting itself. Now his easy demeanor stiffened and his face became hard and

cold as he went on to say with more vehemence and an occasional gesture:

"Who are we? You wonder and you are afraid. It is the Communal Brotherhood, powerful and secret, which seizes this steamer. This is a bold skirmish in the war against capital, against privilege, against the parasitic class which must be utterly destroyed. Labor is the only wealth; but does labor own the factories, the steamships, the land? No, it is enslaved. This stroke will be talked about all over the world. Wealth is always cowardly. It will tremble and——"

From the fringe of the silent company rose the shrill, rasping accents of Jenkins P. Chase. The American multimillionaire was fragile, dyspeptic, and nervous, a mere shred of a man physically, but, given sufficient provocation, he had aggressive courage in abundance. Nor had his enemies in the world of commerce and finance ever called him a coward. This situation exasperated him beyond words.

"You're a fuddle-headed liar, you bragging, anarchistic scoundrel!" he cried, shaking his fist at the speaker. "Cut out all that hot air and balderdash. We can read it in books. Get down to business. What do you propose to do with us? Hold me for ransom?"

The eyes of the bogus Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz were unpleasantly malevolent as he calmly answered:

"It is an accident that you yourself are on board. You were not included in our plans. I do not in-

tend to hold you for ransom. It will be doing a great service to mankind if I throw you into the sea."

Quite undaunted, for his blood was up, Jenkins P. Chase flung back at him:

"You're a lunatic. I presume you are after the two millions in gold, consigned to New York bankers, which is in the ship's treasure-room. You have the upper hand? Why don't you take the plunder and leave us alone?"

"We require no advice from you," and the captor showed his teeth in a mirthless smile. "I wish to inform the passengers that they will be fed as long as they shall behave themselves. They also have permission to use a part of the promenade deck which will be roped off and guarded. Any person attempting to reach other parts of the ship will be shot. It is possible that you will suffer no harm. What to do with you has not yet been decided."

That interested observer, Captain Michael O'Shea, swiftly whispered to Johnny Kent:

"Tuck your gun under the cushion of the settee behind us. The passengers will be searched for arms. The professor knows his business."

The acute mind of Jenkins P. Chase had already concluded that these two men were ready-witted and unafraid. He marked their bearing, and he was impressed with the fact that O'Shea had been aware of trouble aboard the ship before the other passengers suspected it. Inviting them into his luxurious rooms, he brusquely demanded:

"What's your opinion? Have you any suggestions?"

"I am a shipmaster by trade and me large friend here has been chief engineer of a good many steamers," answered O'Shea. "We have knocked some holes in the laws of the high seas ourselves, but ye can set us down as amateurs alongside this rampageous chemical professor. 'Tis the biggest thing of the kind that was ever pulled off. This Vonderholtz has brains and nerve. And he is as cold-blooded as a fish. The man is bad clear through. And he is crammed full of conceit, which is his one weak point, the flaw in his system."

"Call him all the names you please, but how does that help us?" snapped Jenkins P. Chase.

"Go easy, my dear man. 'Twill do no good to hop about like an agitated flea. What I am getting at is this. Vonderholtz is so well pleased with his plans that he thinks they cannot be upset. We may catch him off his guard."

"But what if we do?" demanded Mr. Chase. "These villains have captured the whole crew of the steamer—officers, sailors, stewards."

"'Twas not hard to take them by surprise in the night and lock them in their quarters under guard, sir," explained O'Shea. "Half of them were off watch and asleep, ye must remember. Vonderholtz has near a hundred and fifty men, and no doubt every one of them came aboard with a gun in his clothes. There are enough of them to work the ship and to spare, and I suppose there are navigators and engineers amongst them."

"I can believe all that," irritably interrupted Jenkins P. Chase. "Now that the damnable piracy has succeeded, it is easy enough to see how a gang with a capable leader can take possession of any Atlantic liner. Do you think these scoundrels can be bribed?"

"'Tis not probable. Vonderholtz is a fanatic with his wild ideas about society, and he has recruited men of his own stamp. Besides, they have the two millions in gold in the strong-room to divide 'for the good of humanity.'"

"How will they get away with the gold? The whole thing is preposterous," snorted the millionaire.

"I have read in the newspapers that Mr. Jenkins P. Chase once stole a railroad," pleasantly returned O'Shea. "Maybe you can figure it out better than us two sailormen how Vonderholtz stole a steamship."

"A good hit! You're not so slow yourself," cried the other, not in the least offended.

"The steamer is steering into southern waters," resumed O'Shea, "and 'tis likely that it was arranged beforehand for another vessel to meet her and take the treasure and the men aboard. What will they do with the *Alsatian*? I misdoubt they will sink her with all hands of us, though Vonderholtz would lose no sleep over it, but he will want the world to know about his great blow against the capitalists and the parasites and the likes of us. It is a joke to class Johnny Kent and me as enemies of the poor, could ye look into our pockets."

"It certainly makes me swell up and feel rich to be lumped with the plutocrats," cheerfully observed Johnny Kent.

Jenkins P. Chase let his small bright eyes rove for a moment, and his wise, wizened features were sardonically amused as he said:

"We're in a floating lunatic asylum, where my money is no good. God knows what the crack-brained anarchist in command will do with the ship. He has handed out a jolt to capital, all right. Of course, if you two men can concoct any scheme to win, you're welcome to fill in a blank check for any sum you like and I'll see that it is cashed the day we land in New York."

Captain O'Shea clapped a strong hand on the rich man's bony little shoulder and exclaimed, as though admonishing a foolish child:

"Tut, tut! 'Tis nonsense ye talk. We are all in the same boat, and there are women and children amongst us. You must put it out of your head that your life has any special gilt-edged value out here at sea. We sink or swim together. And I am not anxious to chop off me own existence to please this madman of a Professor Ernst Wilhelm Vonderholtz."

"He said something about chucking me overboard," sighed Jenkins P. Chase.

"And he looked as if he meant it," amiably observed Johnny Kent.

With this, the twain bade the millionaire take heart and left him to his unhappy meditations. An

idea had come to Johnny Kent and he wished to thrash it over with his comrade in the seclusion of their own room. For a long time they argued it, testing every detail, O'Shea dissuading, but convinced against his will that the thing should be attempted. It was a desperate hazard, a forlorn hope, and gray-haired, honest old Johnny Kent must stake his life. Success meant the recapture of the ship, and the engineer was obstinately determined to undertake it.

"You will have to go it alone, Johnny," said O'Shea, "and I cannot help if things break wrong for you. It will worry the heart out of me to let ye do it."

"Pshaw, Cap'n Mike! A battered old sot like me ain't worth much to anybody. If I slip up, and they put out my lights, I want to ask one favor of you. Shoot that blankety-blank chemical son of a sea-cook for me, will you? It'll be my last wish."

"I promise to fill him full of holes, if his gang pots me next minute," simply replied O'Shea, and they shook hands on it.

After dark that night Johnny Kent rummaged in his steamer trunk and fished out an oil-stained suit of blue overalls, his working uniform when in active service. From another bundle he selected two powerful adjustable wrenches which could be concealed in his clothing. While he was thus engaged O'Shea squeezed into the room, affectionately punched him in the ribs, and exclaimed:

"To look the part ye must blacken your face and

hands. We have no coal-dust, but there are two long drinks in that bottle of Scotch yonder. Let us hurl them into our systems, and I will make good use of the cork."

"And burnt-cork me same as I used to do when we boys played nigger minstrels, Cap'n Mike? You're wiser than Daniel Webster."

When the job was finished, Johnny Kent would have passed anywhere as the grimmest, most unrecognizable stoker that ever handled slice-bar or shovel. Peering into the small mirror, he chuckled:

"I feel like cussin' myself from force of habit. Well, I'll just sit here and wait for you to give me the word."

"Aye, aye, Johnny. I will start things moving right away. This is *au revoir*. Good-luck and God bless ye!"

"'Til we meet again, Cap'n Mike. Don't fret about me."

Leaving the stout-hearted old adventurer to pore over a dog-eared copy of the *American Poultry Journal* by way of passing the time, Captain O'Shea returned to the library and called together a dozen of the men passengers whom he knew to be dependable. He had already explained what they were to do, and without attracting the notice of the sentries posted at the outside doorways, they heaped in a corner of the library all the combustible material they could lay their hands on, mostly newspapers and magazines. Several contributed empty cigar boxes, another a crate in which fruit had been brought aboard,

and Jenkins P. Chase appeared with a large bottle of alcohol used for massage.

The stuff was placed close to the wooden bookshelves, which, with their contents, were likely to blaze and smoulder and make a great deal of smoke.

While the men were thus engaged Captain O'Shea chanced to notice the school-teacher, Miss Jenness, who halted while passing the library door. She moved nearer, listened intently to the talk, and then turned away to walk rapidly in the direction of the starboard exit to the deck.

Suspecting her purpose, O'Shea followed and overtook her. Between her and Vonderholtz some sort of an understanding existed, some relation more intimate than she was willing to reveal. O'Shea was alert to prevent her from spoiling his plans. She might not intend to play the part of a spy, but her behavior had been mysterious and she was not to be trusted.

O'Shea called her name sharply, and the girl paused. He moved to her side and said in low tones:

"Are you going on deck, Miss Jenness? I advise ye not to just now."

"Why? I—I—yes. I am going on deck."

She was manifestly startled, unable to hold herself in hand.

"You will give me your word of honor that ye propose to hold no communication with Vonderholtz and to send him no message?"

She hesitated, at a loss for words, and O'Shea felt certain that he had guessed her motive aright. His

decision was instant and ruthless. Standing close to her, he said:

"You will be good enough to go to your state-room for the rest of this night, Miss Jenness, and ye will go at once, moving no nearer the sentries or the deck, and making no outcry. 'Tis a most impolite speech to make to a handsome girl like yourself, but I have no time for courtesy."

Miss Jenness glanced aside. Captain O'Shea stood between her and the passage to the deck. Then she looked at him, and knew that he meant what he said. Her lips parted, her breath was short and quick, and she moved not for a long moment. It was a clash of strong wills, but the woman realized that she was beaten.

It meant death to O'Shea should he be discovered in the act of setting fire to the ship, but he was fighting for more than his own skin. The issue appealed to him as curiously impersonal. His own safety had become a trifling matter. He was merely an instrument in the hands of fate, an agent commissioned to help thwart the tragic destiny that overhung the vessel and her people. The girl was an episode; not so much a personality as a cog of the mysterious, evil mechanism devised by the blond beast Vonderholtz.

"I think I will go to my room," said Miss Jenness.

"Thank you. 'Tis wiser," softly replied O'Shea.

So fatuously confident was Vonderholtz that his plans were invulnerable that he had taken no precautions to have the first-cabin quarters patrolled

and inspected beyond the exits. He had herded the passengers like a flock of sheep and concerned himself no further about them. They could start no uprising by themselves, and unarmed.

Captain O'Shea felt confident that the men in possession of the ship could get the fire under control. At any rate, it must burn itself out within the steel walls of the deck-house. State-rooms and halls might be gutted, but he quoted his favorite adage that one cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. For his part, he would rather burn and sink the ship than meekly to surrender to this mob of pirates.

Thereupon he scratched a match and touched off the fire. Wetted down with alcohol, the newspapers blazed up fiercely and the flames licked the paint-work of shelves and panels. Smoke drove into the halls in thick gusts. The passengers, some of them genuinely frightened, shouted lustily, and there was much confusion.

O'Shea was delighted. His conflagration was a success. The sentries at the doorways and the men on deck ran in pell-mell and dashed out again to find hose and buckets. They bawled orders to one another and were bewildered by the smoke which billowed into the passages.

Before the hose lines had been dragged in and while the fire was unchecked, a bulky figure in blue overalls, his face blackened as with coal-dust, emerged from a state-room, peered cautiously into the smoke, and with tread surprisingly agile for his

weight and years, ran straight toward the crowd of men in the large hall outside the blazing library. The smoke effectually curtailed his dash for the deck. The doorways had been left unguarded. Those whom he shoved out of his way mistook him for one of Vonderholtz's crew.

The stratagem of the fire enabled Johnny Kent to escape from the steel-walled prison and to run the gauntlet of the guards on deck. At top speed he clattered down a ladder to the next deck below, slowed his gait, and stood puffing to regain his breath, for he was a short-winded hero and ample of girth.

In the printed matter advertising the International Line he had discovered a plan of the *Alsatian*, drawn with much detail. He knew it by heart, and was confident that he would not go astray in the labyrinth of her many decks and bulkhead passages. Moreover, he was a man with a lively interest in his calling, and when the *Alsatian* was launched he had studied the descriptions of her machinery and the like with a keen professional eye.

Without hesitation he stepped nimbly through an iron door amidships and entered a narrow alley lighted by an electric bulb. A man, also clad in the overalls of a fireman or machinist, brushed past him, and said, without looking up:

"Fire amount to anything?"

"A stream of water will douse it," gruffly answered Johnny Kent as he emerged from the alley into the great, clangorous open space above the engine-room.

Below him ran iron ladders and platforms, flight after flight, past the huge, shining cylinders, down to the toiling piston-rods and the whirling crank-shafts. Dynamos purred and auxiliary engines hummed in shadowy corners and the pumps beat time to this titanic anthem.

Johnny Kent wiped the dripping sweat from his face and the burnt cork smeared itself in grotesque streaks and blotches. He had reasoned it out that among a hundred and fifty men sailing together for the first time he could pass unchallenged long enough to serve his purpose. And now that he had gained the engine-room his very presence there would safeguard him against suspicion. Men were coming and going, and several of the fire-room gang chatted with the engineers on watch. It would be easier to mingle with them because of this fraternal slackness of discipline.

His stout heart thumping against his ribs, but his spirit undaunted, Johnny Kent stepped from the lowest ladder to the grating of the engine-room floor. Pulling the greasy black cap low over his eyes, he dodged behind a steam-pipe and made for the entrance to the nearest fire-room. Stripped to the waist in the red glare, the stokers were rattling coal into furnace doors. Johnny Kent said never a word, but picked up a shovel and took his station in front of a boiler. An officer of some sort shouted at him:

"Who sent you down?"

"I was ordered to shift my watch," bellowed Johnny Kent.

"Good enough. We are short-handed," was the reply.

The heat and the arduous exertion made Johnny Kent grunt, but he had been a mighty man with a shovel in his time, and he would show these scoundrels how to feed a furnace. He observed that armed guards were stationed in this compartment, and concluded that some of the steamer's regular crew had been set to work under compulsion.

Thus far he had made no blunders. There had been no flaw in his plans. His greatest fear was that Vonderholtz might come below and recognize him. But the conflagration conducted by Captain O'Shea was likely to keep the leader on deck.

Painstakingly Johnny Kent sought to recall every scrap of information he had read in technical journals concerning the under-water specifications of the *Alsatian*. His memory was tenacious and he believed that he could trust it now.

He had entered the fire-room in the middle of a watch, and therefore had not long to serve as a stoker before the men were relieved and another gang took their places. When the next watch came trooping in, there was much passing to and fro, and as one of the crowd Johnny Kent felt much safer against discovery. He knew where to find dark corners and tortuous passageways in this compact, noisy part of the ship, far below the water-line.

When the firemen of his watch began to climb the ladders to their living quarters, he was not among them. Two hours later, a bulky gray-headed per-

son in blue overalls might have been seen crawling on hands and knees or wriggling on his stomach in the bilge of the *Alsatian's* hull, beneath the floor.

From the state-room wall he had unscrewed the small candle lamp provided for use when the electric-lighting system was turned off. With this feeble light he was searching for the sea-cocks, those massive valves set into the bottom of a steamer's hull for the purpose of letting in the ocean and flooding her in the emergency of fire in the cargo holds and coal-bunkers. A steamer is sometimes saved from total destruction by beaching her in shoal water and opening the sea-cocks.

To open these valves in the bottom of the *Alsatian* was to admit a rush of water which would soon rise to the furnaces and engine-room in greater volume than the steam-pumps could hold in check. It was not Johnny Kent's mad intention to sink the liner in mid-ocean, although this was a possible consequence.

After prodigious exertion, he found what he sought and bent his burly strength to releasing the gate-valves constructed to withstand the pressure of the sea. He heard the water pour in with sobbing gush and murmur and splash against the steel plates and beams. With a healthy prejudice against being drowned in a cataract of his own devising, Johnny Kent scrambled in retreat and regained the engine-room compartment, bruised and exhausted.

Thus far he had succeeded because of the sheer audacity of the enterprise. It was a seemingly im-

possible thing to do, but the process of reasoning which inspired it was particularly sane and cool-headed. He had been unchallenged because it never entered the minds of his foes that any one would dare such a stratagem. They had gained the upper hand by means of force. In a game of wits they were out-manceuvred. Johnny Kent showed the superior intelligence.

"It looks as if my job as Daniel in the lions' den was about done," he said to himself.

He became a stowaway until the next watch was changed in the fire-room. Then he mingled with the crowd of sooty men who went off duty. Unmolested, he clambered up the ladders, slipped into an alley-way, and came to the promenade deck with the blessed open sky above him. Ostentatiously swinging a wrench, he ambled aft and reconnoitred the entrance to the first-cabin quarters. Men were dragging out lines of hose, others chopping away charred woodwork and pitching it overboard. One of them paused to look at the large grimy person in overalls, but he displayed the wrench and casually explained:

"Orders from the engine-room. The heat warped the skylight fittings. Hot work, wasn't it?"

Once inside the doorway, Johnny Kent made for his state-room, which had been untouched by fire. O'Shea saw him pass, but made no sign of recognition. A few minutes later the comrades twain were holding a glad reunion behind the bolted door. The engineer collapsed on the transom berth and

sat in a ponderous heap, holding his head in his hands.

"My legs are trembly and I feel all gone in the pit of my stummick, Cap'n Mike," he huskily croaked. "I was plumb near scared to death. This easy livin' has made me soft, and I ain't as young as I was. But I got away with it."

"How? 'Tis a miracle ye have performed this night, Johnny, me boy."

"I let in the water and she'll flood herself," was the weary reply. "It was easy after I once ran the blockade. What about your bonfire? She was a corker by the looks of things."

"She was that," laughed O'Shea. "Vonderholtz came boilin' in with his men and put it out after a tussle. He suspected we touched it off, but he could not prove it. It was the stump of a cigar that some careless gentleman tossed into the library wastebasket, ye understand. Let me help you get your clothes off. Lie down and rest yourself."

Kicking off the overalls, Johnny Kent lighted his pipe, stretched himself in his bunk, and exclaimed:

"I'll turn in with my duds on. We are liable to be roused out between now and morning."

"Are ye sure the ship will not go to the bottom?" anxiously asked O'Shea.

"I won't swear to it, Cap'n Mike, but this is a well-built steamer, and she was new a year ago. Her bulkheads will stand up under a lot of pressure. The engine and fire room compartments will fill to

the water-line, but she'll float, or I've made a darn bad blunder."

"You know your business, Johnny. If the blackguards think she is sinking under them, 'tis all we ask."

"Tuck me in and wash my face," murmured the engineer. "I'm too doggoned tired to worry about it."

O'Shea made him comfortable and withdrew to keep an eye on events. Order had been restored. The passengers were once more closely guarded, and as a new precaution sentries were stationed in the halls. O'Shea waited until the men with revolvers were relieved at midnight and another squad took their places. Then he heard one of them say to another that there was serious trouble below. The ship had run over a bit of submerged wreckage or somehow damaged her bottom plates. She was leaking. The water was making into the midship compartments.

To O'Shea this was the best news in the world. With an easier mind, he went to his room. The hateful inaction, the humiliating imprisonment, were almost over. God helping him, he would whip this crew of outlaws on the morrow and win the mastery of the *Alsatian*.

Before daybreak Johnny Kent turned over in his bunk and growled:

"She's slowed down, Cap'n Mike. The engines are no more than turnin' over. That means the water is almost up to the furnaces and the men are

desertin' their posts. You can't keep firemen below when the black water is sloshin' under their feet. It gets their nerve."

"The whole crew will go to pieces if the panicky feeling once takes hold of them, Johnny. They have never worked together. A lot of them are no seamen at all. And Vonderholtz will not be able to hold them."

The *Alsatian* moved more and more sluggishly, like a dying ship. The water was pouring into her faster than the pumps could lift it overside. It was only a question of hours before the fires would be extinguished, the machinery stilled, and the liner no more than a sodden hulk rolling aimlessly in the Atlantic.

The passengers were no longer under guard. They walked the decks as they pleased. The communal brethren, who had found it so easy to capture the ship, were now at their wits' ends. Once or twice their leader passed hastily between the bridge and the engine-room. The confident, sneering egotism no longer marked the demeanor of the man. Nervously twisting his blond beard, he moved as one without definite purpose. His elaborate enterprise was in a bad way. The war against society had suffered an unexpected reverse.

O'Shea and Johnny Kent watched him gloatingly. The advantage was all theirs. They were waiting for the right moment to strike, and to strike hard. They saw Vonderholtz halt to speak to Miss Jenness, who stood apart and alone. He argued with fiery

gestures. She protested earnestly, her face sad and tragic. It was as though they had come to the parting of the ways.

At length the *Alsatian* ceased to forge ahead. The water conquered her. The long, black hull rode low, sagging wearily to starboard. The bulkheads still held firm, but it seemed inevitable that she must shortly plunge to the bottom.

Vonderholtz and his men were between the devil and the deep sea in more ways than one. They dared signal no passing vessel and ask assistance, for the gallows awaited them ashore. Many of them were for abandoning the liner at once. It was useless, they argued, to wait until she foundered under their feet. The *Alsatian* had become untenable.

Refusing to acknowledge that ruin had overtaken his splendid conspiracy, Vonderholtz stormed like a madman at the cowards who would take to the boats. He swore he would stand by the ship until she went down. Were they to abandon the two millions in gold? It was impossible to save it in the boats. Castaways could not explain the possession of a fortune in treasure.

The mutineers, who had openly broken away from their leader, replied that they would quit the ship and take chances of being picked up or of making a landing at the Azores. Let the crew and passengers drown in the ship, and good riddance to them.

The dissension increased, the bravest of the rascals resolutely standing by Vonderholtz. Those who were for deserting the liner began to crowd to the

boats and swing them out, ready for lowering. Discipline had vanished.

Captain Michael O'Shea said a word to Johnny Kent, who pulled his revolver from the breast of his shirt. Twenty of the passengers were ready for the order. Some had armed themselves with pieces of steel piping unscrewed from the frames of the state-room berths. Others flourished clubs of scantling saved from the wreckage of the fire. They were men unused to violence—lawyers, merchants, even a clergyman—but they were ready to risk their lives to win freedom from their shameful plight.

The compact little band swept out on deck like a cyclone. O'Shea and Johnny Kent opened fire, shooting to kill. The enemy was taken in flank and in rear. Those who were busied with the boats tumbled into them. Before the rush of the passengers could be checked they had cleared a path forward and gained the stairway to the bridge-deck. Scattering shots wounded one or two, but shelter was found behind the wheel-house and chart-room.

O'Shea ran to the captain's quarters and entered with fear in his heart. The room was empty, but there was blood on the floor and signs of a struggle.

"They did away with him," O'Shea cried, his voice choked. "He died like a brave sailor. Now for the officers."

Snatching an axe from the rack in the wheel-house, he jumped for the row of cabins. The first door was locked and he smashed it in with mighty

blows. The chief officer of the *Alsatian* was discovered within, irons on his wrists, a nasty wound slanting across his forehead.

"Take me out of this and give me a gun," sobbed the stalwart Englishman.

"How about the rest of ye?" shouted O'Shea.

"They shot the old man and clubbed Hayden, second officer, to death. The others are alive."

"Lay your hands on the rail yonder and hold steady," O'Shea commanded him. "I will shear the links of those bracelets with the axe."

This done they broke into the other rooms and released the surviving junior officers who had been surprised while asleep. Raging and cursing, they caught up axes and iron belaying-pins and joined O'Shea in the sally to release the seamen locked up in the forecastle and the stewards penned below. Recognizing the grave danger, Vonderholtz tried to rally his armed men and hold the boat-deck against attack. But his force was divided and disorganized and part of it was in the boats. His power had crumbled in a moment. He was on the defensive, fighting for life.

Now the crew of the *Alsatian* came swarming against him, even the stewards no longer obsequious slaves of the tray and napkin but yelping like wolves. Heedless of bullets, the large force led by O'Shea, Johnny Kent, and the chief officer of the *Alsatian* charged with irresistible ferocity. They penned forty of the Communal Brotherhood between the rail and the deck-house amidships, and fairly hammered

and jammed them through the nearest doorway and made them prisoners.

Vonderholtz comprehended that the ship was lost to him and that it was every man for himself and flight into the boats. He somehow got clear of the whirling conflict, found room to turn, and stood with his back to a derrick-mast while he let drive with his pistol and put a bullet through O'Shea's arm.

Roaring vengeance, Johnny Kent would have killed the blond leader in his tracks, but just then Miss Jenness ran swiftly to Vonderholtz, caught hold of his hand, and urged him frantically toward the nearest boat. Johnny Kent forbore to shoot. He could not hit his target without driving a bullet through the girl. Nor did any man hinder them, as Vonderholtz and Miss Jenness, dark, tragic, incomprehensible, moved quickly to the edge of the ship and leaped into the crowded boat that had just swung clear. It descended from the overhanging davits and plopped into the smooth sea. As the falls were unhooked at the bow and stern, the men on the thwarts set the long oars in the thole-pins and clumsily pushed away from the side of the liner.

It would have been easy to shoot Vonderholtz from the deck above, but he crouched in the stern-sheets with the girl clinging close at his side, so that she seemed to be trying to shield him. No one was willing to risk killing the woman in order to deal retribution to the chief criminal.

"Blaze away at the other boats! Kill all you

can!" shouted the chief officer of the *Alsation*. "Shoot into the thick of them before they pull out of range!"

"Let them go," gravely counselled O'Shea, who was trying to bandage his bleeding arm. "God Almighty will hand out justice to them. Those boats will not live through the first squall, for they are overcrowded and there are few seamen amongst them."

The lawful crew of the *Alsation* gathered together and watched the boats drift to leeward. There was no more shooting by either side. It was as if a truce had been declared. Johnny Kent made a trumpet of his hands and shouted in tremendous tones to the boat in which Vonderholtz had escaped:

"We tricked you and we whipped you, you cowardly dogs. The ship will float and she'll be towed to port. The laugh is on you, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, my gay chemical professor."

Cries of rage arose from the boats, but there was no returning to the liner, no possible way of scaling her towering sides. Her own crew held possession of her as securely as if they were in a fortress. The wind freshened briskly and the boats drifted farther and farther away to leeward. The men who filled them must face the dreadful perils and sufferings of castaways in mid-ocean. At length the boats became no more than white specks, and then they vanished beyond the misty horizon.

"If Vonderholtz could have had his way he would have destroyed the ship with every soul in her before he abandoned her," said O'Shea.

"He had me on the list," piped up Jenkins P. Chase, who strutted importantly, for he had knocked down a foeman and clubbed him into submission. "Now, about that young woman, Miss Jenness. Hanged if she wasn't a fine-looking proposition. There's a romance for you, eh?"

"'Tis my guess that she loved him but could not stand for his violent doctrines," said O'Shea. "And she was afraid to oppose him for fear she would lose him entirely. And maybe he persuaded her to make this voyage with him and he would take her away to live with him somewhere and be happy. 'Twas an evil day for her when she met him, wherever it was, but she was ready to die for him. The love of women!"

Four days later an unlovely little British cargo tramp, wandering across from South America with an empty hold, sighted the *Alsatian* helpless and flying signals of distress. The humble skipper of this beggarly craft could not believe his eyes. His wildest, most fantastic dreams of salvage were about to come true. As he steamed alongside the chief officer of the liner shouted:

"Tow us to New York and settle with the owners."

"Will I?" bawled the bewhiskered skipper, dancing a jig. "I'll hang onto my end of the bloomin' hawser as long as this hooker of mine will float. Are you stove up inside? Broke a shaft?"

"No. Engine-room full of water. We opened the sea-cocks on purpose."

"You're drunk or crazy," cried the skipper; "but I will tow you to hades for the price that will be awarded for this job."

It was a plucky undertaking for the under-engined, under-manned tramp, but the *Alsatian* sent extra hands aboard, and the two vessels crept slowly in toward the Atlantic coast, swung to the northward, and after a tedious voyage came in sight of Sandy Hook. The wild and tragic experience through which she had passed seemed incredible to those on board. So many days overdue was this crack liner of the International service that tugs had been sent to search for her. The newspapers reported her as missing and probably lost.

"You and Johnny Kent will be grand-stand heroes," said Jenkins P. Chase to Captain Michael O'Shea. "You have done a tremendously big thing, you know. By jingo, nothing is too good for you. Of course, the company will treat you handsomely and come down with the cash. But don't forget my proposition. It still holds good. Come to my office and fill out a blank check and I'll sign it like a shot. That murderous scoundrel, Vonderholtz, intended to throw me overboard. I saw it in his eyes."

"About that check, Mr. Chase," said O'Shea with a friendly smile, "forget it. You are a great little man, and we forgive you for being so rich, but 'twas not the kind of a job that seafarin' men take money for from a shipmate. Johnny and me

had to find a way out. It was a matter of professional pride, as ye might say."

The rubicund engineer beamed his indorsement of this sentiment and added cheerily:

"What the company chooses to give us will be our lawful due, which we earned in savin' property and treasure. And if my share amounts enough to buy me a tidy little farm in the grand old State o' Maine, I won't envy you and your millions one darned solitary mite, Mr. Jenkins P. Chase. And I won't feel like joining any Communal Brotherhood to take 'em away from you."

THE BRANDED MAN

I

AN elderly man of ample girth was plying a hoe in a very neat and tidy vegetable garden. His battered, good-natured visage reflected pleasure in the task and contentment with existence. Blue overalls were hitched to his shoulders by a pair of straps. A lock of gray hair poked itself through a hole in his ragged straw hat. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up to display a pair of ponderous, sunburnt arms upon which were tattooed an anchor and a pink-eyed mermaid. Ever and anon this bucolic person turned his attention to a boy who was weeding the onion bed on his hands and knees, and thundered admonitions at him in a voice that carried across the pasture and startled the grazing cows.

The youth thus bombarded showed no signs of terror. In fact, he grinned quite amiably as if hardened to threats of being skinned alive or triced up by the thumbs. Obviously, he considered his employer's bark worse than his bite. At length the latter leaned on his hoe to remark with heated candor:

"Say, Bub, those weeds grow faster than you pull 'em up. Is there anything slower than you in this part of the country?"

The boy turned from watching a woodchuck

meander toward its hole and promptly answered with a touch of pride:

"It runs in the family, Mr. Kent. My pa is the slowest man in the village, an' my grand-dad was slower than he be, so ma says. Us Perkinses is all slower'n molasses in January."

"Well, if I could find another boy, I'd lift you off this farm by the slack of your pants," snorted Johnny Kent. "You make me peevish in spots, and I aim to be the happiest man on earth."

"You can't find another boy," was the unruffled reply. "They're all off hayin'. Say, Mr. Kent, it's a great day to go fishin'. An' this garden is jes' full of fat, juicy angle-worms."

"Doggone it, Bub, I'll have to go you," cried the elderly gardener with smiling animation. "You dig the bait and we'll start right after dinner."

He forsook the vegetables and moved at a leisurely gait in the direction of a small white cottage with green blinds, in front of which blazed a gorgeous profusion of hollyhocks. At the porch he halted to drop into a canvas hammock, the ropes of which were spliced sailorwise, and sought his ease for a few minutes while he fondly contemplated his landed possessions. The green fields, rolling and pleasantly diversified by patches of woodland, were framed by ancient stone-walls. In the foreground loomed the capacious barn, flanked by the hen-house and woodshed. To the right of the cottage extended an apple orchard whose gnarled trees were laden with fruit.

It was here that Johnny Kent had cast anchor, in

the haven of his dreams, and he roundly swore that the sea should know him no more. He was done with nursing crippled engines and hammering drunken stokers. The hazards of his calling were for younger men. A stroke of good fortune during his last voyage with Captain Michael O'Shea, in the liner *Alsatian*, had given him the cash in hand to pay for the longed-for "farm in the grand old State o' Maine" and a surplus to stow in the bank.

"Here I am," he said to himself as he swung his legs in the hammock, "and it's too blamed good to be true, honest it is. Fightin' potato-bugs is all the excitement I pine for, and when the red cow lets go her hind foot and capsizes me and the pail and the milkin'-stool, it's positively thrilling. No watches to stand and nothing to pester me, barrin' that lazy, tow-headed Perkins boy. And I'm going fishin' with him this afternoon just to show myself how independent I am of skippers and owners and charters and such foolishness."

With this the retired chief engineer entered the cottage and passed into the kitchen. The floors had been scrubbed white with sand and holy-stone. The brass door-knobs and andirons were polished like gold. The wood-work glistened with speckless white paint. What furniture there was consisted of solid, old-fashioned pieces, such as Windsor chairs, a highboy, a claw-footed table or two, and a desk of bird's-eye maple. No bric-a-brac cluttered them. Habit had schooled this nautical housekeeper to dispense with loose stuff which might go adrift in a heavy sea-way.

Kicking himself out of his overalls, he tied a white apron about his waist and bent his attention to the kitchen stove. The green peas were boiling merrily, the potatoes were almost baked, and it was time to fry the bacon and eggs. He cooked his own dinner with as hearty good-will as he had hoed the garden. It was all part of the game which he enjoyed with such boyish zest.

Stepping to the back door, he blew a blast on a tin horn to summon the Perkins boy. That lazy urchin sped out of the onion bed as if he had wings, and Johnny Kent was moved to comment:

"Be careful, Bub, or your family'll disown you. You came bowlin' along to your vittles like you were actually alive! Right after dinner you wash the dishes and scour them tins, and if you leave a spot on 'em no bigger than a flea's whisker, I'll nail your hide to the barn door. Then we'll hitch up the mare and jog along to East Pond with our fish-poles."

"Folks in town think it kind o' queer you don't hire a woman to keep house," said the Perkins offspring as he took the wash-basin down from its hook.

"You can tell 'em with my compliments that they're a gabby lot of gossips and ought to have a stopper put on their jaw-tackle," returned Johnny Kent with surprising heat and a perceptible blush. "I can look after myself without any advice from the village."

Young Perkins snickered and thought it wise to change the subject. When they sat down to table,

the host was in the best of humor as he declaimed with tremendous gusto:

"Did you ever taste such peas? Raised 'em myself. Cooked in cream from my own cow. Early Rose potatoes from my own garden. Eggs from my own hens. They lay 'em every day."

"Hens have to lay or bust this time o' year," prosaically replied the youth. "An' peas is peas."

"Romance was plumb left out of your system," sighed the mariner. "All the years I was wanderin' over the high seas seem tame and monotonous alongside this."

Before the meal was ended there came an interruption. Johnny Kent dropped knife and fork and suspiciously sniffed the breeze which drew through the open windows. "Bub" Perkins likewise showed uneasy symptoms and cocked his freckled snub nose to sniff the air. It was a tableau evidently of some importance. Presently they both arose without a word and hastened out of doors to scan the peaceful landscape far and near.

"I smelled wood smoke, sure as guns," said Johnny Kent.

"So did I. I bet a cooky it's another fire," excitedly cried young Perkins. "I can't see anything, can you?"

"Not yet. The woods have been afire seven times in the last week, and it ain't accidental, Bub. The buildings will begin to go next. My farm has been spared so far."

The boy was climbing into an apple-tree, from

which perch he was able to gaze over the hill beyond the pasture. He could see a hazy cloud of smoke drifting among the pine growth of a neighboring farm and in the undergrowth glowed little spurts of flame like crimson ribbons. The fire had gained small headway, but unless speedily checked it might sweep destructively over a large area.

"No fishin' trip to-day," sorrowfully muttered Johnny Kent. "Pick up the shovels and hoes and some empty grain sacks, Bub, while I put the mare in the buggy. It's a case of all hands turnin' out again."

The call of duty had never found the stout-hearted mariner indifferent, and a few minutes later he was driving down the country road under forced draught, the vehicle bounding over rocks and ruts, and the Perkins boy hanging on with both hands. Already the alarm had spread, and farmers were leaving their mowing machines and hay-racks in the fields to hurry in the direction of the burning woodland. Wagons loaded with men came rattling out from the village. Two or three of the recent fires, so mysteriously frequent, had done much damage, and the neighborhood was alert to respond.

Experience had taught the volunteer force how to operate. They dashed into the woodland and fought the fire at close range. Some wetted sacks in a near-by brook and beat out the flying embers and the blazing grass. Others shovelled sand and earth upon the creeping skirmish-line of the conflagration. The most agile climbed the trees, which

were just beginning to catch, and chopped off the flaming, sizzling branches. They toiled like heroes, regardless of the wilting heat and blinding, choking smoke.

Johnny Kent was not a man to spare himself, and he raged in the fore-front of the embattled farmers, exerting himself prodigiously, shouting orders, taking command as a matter of habit. The others obeyed him, being afraid to do anything else, although they knew more about fighting forest fires than he. The elderly marine engineer had grown unaccustomed to such violent endeavor, and he puffed and grunted hugely and ran rivers of perspiration.

So promptly had the neighbors mustered that the flames were conquered before they could jump into the thickest part of the woodland and swirl through the tops of the pines. Leaving a patrol to search the undergrowth in search of stray sparks, the farmers withdrew from the blackened area and gathered together to listen to the excited story of a young man armed with a shot-gun.

"This ain't the first fire that's been set on my property," said he. "My pasture was touched off in three places last Saturday night, but a heavy shower of rain come along and put it out. Next mornin', just before day, my corn-crib was burnt to the ground. Since then I've been lookin' around in the woods whenever I could spare the time——"

"It's spite work or there's a lunatic firebug roam-in' the country," put in the first selectman of the village.

"The spite ain't aimed at me in particular," resumed the young man with the gun. "Mark Wilson's wood lot has been set, and the Widow Morgan's back field, and nobody knows where it will happen next. As I was about to say, when I fust seen the smoke this afternoon I was on the other side of the young growth, and I put for it as hard as I could. And I saw a man sneakin' away from the fire. I threw up my gun to give him a dose of buckshot, but he dodged among the trees and was over the hill and down in the hollow before you could say Jack Robinson. I ain't very speedy since I was throwed out of the dingle-cart and broke my leg, and the strange man got away from me."

"He's the crittur that's been settin' all the fires," exclaimed the first selectman. "What in thunder did he look like, Harry? Give me a description, and I'll call a special meeting of the board to-night, and we'll offer a reward, mebbe as much as twenty dollars."

"I can't say exactly. He was six feet tall, or five, anyhow, and light-complected, though he might have been dark, and he had on brown clothes, but I ain't quite sure about the color. Anyhow, he's the man we've got to ketch before we can sleep easy in our beds."

Johnny Kent was too weary to take much interest in a man-hunt, even with the magnificent largeness of twenty dollars in prospect. Summoning the Perkins boy, who was heaving rocks at a small turtle on the bank of the brook, he clambered heavily into the

buggy and turned the mare toward the road. The afternoon had been spoiled and the worthy mariner was in a disgruntled mood. A serpent had entered his Eden. Likely enough the scoundrel who was starting conflagrations all over the landscape would soon give his attention to the beloved farm with the white cottage and the very neat and tidy vegetable garden.

The owner thereof ambled to the porch with the gait of one utterly exhausted and dumped himself into the nearest chair. His face was well blackened with smoke and soot. His raiment had been torn to rags by the thickets through which he had so gallantly plunged. He looked like an uncommonly large scarecrow in the last stages of disrepair. Moreover, his eyes were reddened and smarted acutely, he had a stitch in the side, and his stomach ached.

While he reposed in this state of ruin, there came briskly walking through his front gate a ruddy, well-knit figure of a man, young in years, whose suit of blue serge became him jauntily. Halting to survey the trimly ordered flower-beds and vine-covered portico, he ceased whistling a snatch of a sea chantey and nodded approvingly. Following the path to the side of the cottage, he beheld the disreputable person seated in a state of collapse upon the porch. Instead of expressing courteous sympathy, the visitor put his hands on his hips and laughed uproariously.

Stung by this rude levity, Johnny Kent heaved himself to his feet and hurled the chair at the head of the heartless young man, who dodged it nimbly,

ducked the swing of a fist big enough to land him in the middle of next week, if not farther, and shoved the engineer into the canvas hammock where he floundered helplessly and sputtered:

"Howdy, Cap'n Mike! It's a low-down Irish trick to laugh at a man that's all wore out and tore up the way I am."

Captain Michael O'Shea strove to check his unseemly mirth and thumped his old comrade affectionately as he explained:

"So this is the happy, simple life that ye cracked on about for years. You look it, Johnny. Was it an explosion that wrecked you or have ye been cleaning boilers? And is every day like this on the dear old homestead?"

"Not by a darn sight. I had to take a turn of extra duty. I'm the happiest man in the world, Cap'n Mike. And I'm tickled to death to clap eyes on you. Wait till I wash up and change my clothes."

"Sure I'll wait, Johnny. 'Tis a visit I have come to pay. You are sensitive about the terrible condition I find ye in, so I will say no more. But if I was surveyin' you for Lloyds, I would mark you down as a total loss. And how are the pigs and chickens?"

The portly farmer brightened instantly and wheeled in the door to exclaim:

"You just ought to see 'em! Now how did I get along at sea all those years without 'em? Can you tell me that?"

"'Twas the lack of them that made ye so thin and melancholy," said O'Shea with a grin. "Clean your-

self up and fill the old pipe with the wicked brand of cut plug that ye misname tobacco, and we will sit down and talk it over."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n Mike. And there's some bottles of beer in the ice-box in the wood-shed. It's just abaft the galley. Help yourself."

The shipmaster enjoyed exploring the cottage while his host repaired damages and presently reappeared in a white-duck uniform, which he had worn as chief engineer of the English steamer *Tarlington*.

"There now, you look more like a man and less like a fat coal-heaver that has blown all his wages for rum," said Captain O'Shea. "And will ye rummage in the lockers for a bite to eat? The train that fetched me had difficulty in finding this cute little town of yours. I mistrust 'twas not on the chart at all, and we wandered for hours and hours looking for it and stopping to take soundings at ten million way-stations. Where is the cook?"

"I'm the whole crew," replied Johnny Kent as he convoyed his guest into the kitchen. "You see, Cap'n Mike, I found it wouldn't do to have a woman workin' for me. All the old maids and widows in the township seemed anxious to get the berth. But a solid man like me, with money in the bank, has to be careful. Confound it, they pestered me! I don't want to talk about it."

Until sunset the comrades yarned and laughed, sprawling in the shade of an apple-tree or rambling arm-in-arm over the farm. Then the mariner had his

chores to do, which consisted mostly in bullying the Perkins boy, while O'Shea chuckled to think of the tempestuous scenes in which he had beheld Johnny Kent play a dominant part. The shipmaster had a purpose up his sleeve, but he had artfully delayed disclosing it until he could discover how firmly the engineer was anchored to his pastoral existence.

After supper, which O'Shea helped prepare with the handiness of a sailor, they walked slowly to and fro in the garden, falling into step by force of habit, for thus they had passed many an hour on bridge and deck beneath the stars. The tranquillity of the place, the sense of comfort and repose, soothed the restless temper of O'Shea and turned his mind to thoughts of a home and fireside of his own. But he was well aware that this mood would pass.

"'Tis sad I am that I cannot tarry long with you and your intelligent pigs and hens, Johnny," said he, "but I have a bit of business in hand."

"What is it? Does it look good to you, Cap'n Mike?" demanded the other. "We've been so busy livin' our fights and frolics all over again that I haven't had a chance to hurl questions at you. Why don't you stay ashore and take it easy for a while? You've got money; plenty of it. Blow it like a gentleman."

"And what would be the fun of that? I have a charter in mind. Would ye like to hear of it?"

The contented farmer cocked his head alertly and stood in his tracks. The light in his eye was not inspired by his neat rows of beets, carrots, and cab-

gages. O'Shea perceived that he was curious, and hastened to add, in the most winning accents:

"'Tis the kind of a game you used to like, Johnny. I have looked over the steamer, and she would please you. Politics are stewin' in the Persian Gulf and intrigues are as thick as huckleberries. The British and the Russians have locked horns again, do ye mind, and the poor deluded Persians will be prodded into a revolution, and divil a bit of good it will do them. When the smoke clears the two benevolent Powers will try to beat each other to the plunder. Just now they are manoeuvrin' for position."

"Pshaw! Cap'n Mike, haven't you recovered from them delusions about the Persian Gulf?" growled the engineer.

"'Tis no dream, Johnny. I have met a man in New York. He came from Europe to find me. The proposition is copper-riveted. I take the steamer and load her with arms and munitions in a Mediterranean port and deliver them to certain parties somewheres the other side of Aden. The British gun-boats are patrollin' the Gulf to put a crimp in this industry, so there will be a run for me money."

Johnny Kent was silent while he meditated and listened to the whisper of temptation. Then a pig grunted in its straw litter, a chicken chirped drowsily on its perch, and the breeze rustled among the luxuriant pole-beans and tomatoes. And O'Shea had come to coax him away from this enchanted place. He would hear what the blarneying rascal had to say

and convince him of his folly. The shipmaster liked not the stolid silence of his companion. He knew it of old for a stubbornness that nothing could budge. However, he went on with the argument:

"I need an engineer, Johnny. And will ye not take one more fling with me? You are an old rover, and this messing about a farm will not content you for long. 'Tis no place for a bold man that knows his trade. Wait a bit and come back here when ye have seen the green seas tumbling over the bows once more and felt the swing of a good ship under you, and heard the trade-winds singing in your ears, and watched the strange faces in ports that are new to ye."

"I've heard you talk before, Cap'n Mike, and your tongue never gets hung on a dead-centre," was the deliberate reply. "You'll have to dish up something more attractive than the blisterin' Persian Gulf to drag me from my moorings. Do I act restless?"

"About as much so as that old barn yonder," admitted the other.

"See here, Cap'n Mike, the farm next to mine can be bought cheap. It cuts a hundred tons of hay and pastures forty head of stock. I meant to write you about it soon. Why don't you buy it and settle down alongside of me?"

"You are the hopeless old barnacle," laughed O'Shea. "'Tis plain that I waste me words. If my seductive persuasions have missed fire entirely I must bid ye farewell in the morning and lay a course back to New York."

"I wish I could hold you longer," sighed Johnny Kent. "The Grange picnic comes right after hayin', and there's other excitements to keep you busy."

"And this is the talk I hear from a man that used to enjoy risking his neck between the divil and the deep sea. Maybe ye can offer me the mad intoxication of a husking-bee."

"They're out of season just now," seriously returned the agriculturist.

"Well, we will not quarrel, Johnny. I have taken notice that it made you fretty to ask why ye were so mussed up and dirty when I strolled in this afternoon. Have you cooled off by now and do you mind explaining yourself? You were an awful sight and I was near moved to tears."

"You laughed at me like a darned hyena," grumbled Johnny. "It wa'n't friendly, Cap'n Mike. I'd been fightin' a fire till I was wrecked fore and aft. And for all I know we may have to turn out again to-night and fight another one."

"Then I will stand watch and watch with you and keep lookout. And why have ye turned prophet? Can you predict them, same as you read the weather signs?"

"Pretty near," dolefully answered Johnny Kent. "Some miserable scoundrel has been settin' the woods afire to burn us all out. He was sighted to-day, but the lunk-head that caught him in the act wasn't quick enough to shoot him. Settin' fires in a dry season like this is as bad as murder."

O'Shea had found something to interest him. There might be a spice of adventure in this drowsy

region. And his friend seemed so genuinely worried that he was eager to help him. With a thrill of gratitude he recalled a certain night off a tropic coast when Johnny Kent had led the gang that descended into a blazing hold and saved a ship from being blown to atoms.

"Maybe my business in New York can wait a day or so longer," said he. "'Tis unmannerly of me to leave you accumulating more white hairs in that frosty old thatch of yours."

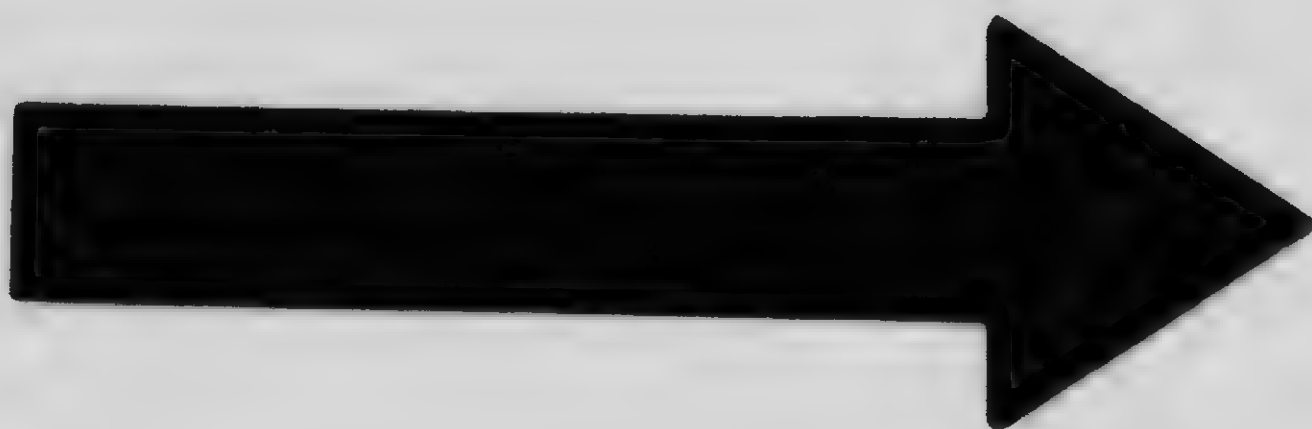
"You'd sooner hunt trouble than a square meal," gratefully exclaimed Johnny. "I ain't so spry on my feet as I was, and my wind is short, or I'd go after this firebug and scupper him by myself. I haven't felt real worried over it till to-day, but he's worked nearer and nearer my place, and I'm blamed if I can set up all night watchin' for him."

"'Tis a tired man I know you are to-night, so I will tuck ye in, and then I will wander a bit and keep an eye lifted. It would please me to run afoul of this unpleasant gentleman with the bonfire habit."

"The fires have been coming in couples, Cap'n Mike. If there's one in the daytime, it's a good bet that another one will break loose the next night."

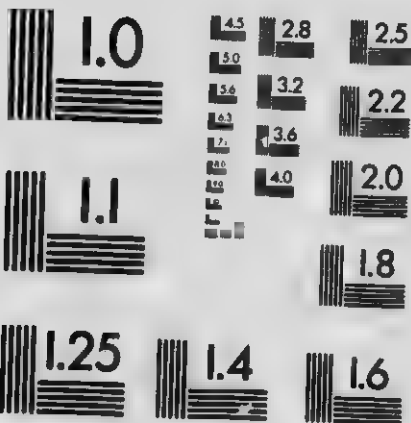
The engineer yawned and confessed with an air of apology: "I'm tuckered and no mistake. Suppose I turn in now and you rouse me out at eight bells of the first watch."

"Right enough. Where's your old pair of night-glasses; and have ye a gun? If I find the disturber



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I may want to bend it over his head. I would sooner catch him than kill him."

"It ain't a mite hospitable to treat you this way, Cap'n Mike."

"Pooh, man. Ye do me a favor. 'Twould reconcile me to buying the next farm if there was a chance of a ruction now and then."

An hour later Captain Michael O'Shea was climbing the long, easy slope of the barn roof. One end of it supported a water-tank built upon a platform of stout timbers. Here the enterprising lookout found room to sit and scrutinize the surrounding woods and fields. The sky was starlit but the darkness had a duskier, more impenetrable quality than on a clear night at sea. O'Shea's keen vision, accustomed to sweep large and lonely horizons, was rather baffled, but the powerful glasses enabled him to distinguish the vague outlines of the woodland and meadow and pasture boundaries.

In a blithe humor he smiled at the odd situation in which he found himself. Good old Johnny Kent had actually achieved a farm, and here was his commander perched on top of the barn like a weathercock, and enjoying it, forsooth. His nimble wits had framed the most effective strategy possible. It would be futile to go blundering through the woods on a blind trail. From his elevated station he could see the first spark of fire to glow in any direction. The incendiary would linger to make sure that the fire had fairly caught, and O'Shea hoped to catch him unawares and overpower him.

The silent hours wore on and drew near to midnight when he had promised to arouse Johnny Kent. Nothing suspicious had been descried. A whippoorwill sounded its call with such breathless, unflagging persistence that the sentinel amused himself counting the sweet, monotonous notes and concluded that a vast deal of energy was going to waste.

"That bird is over-engined for its tonnage," he reflected. "Well, I have stood me watch in worse places than this. 'Tis a shame to turn poor old Johnny out of his bunk. I will stay up here awhile and listen to the long-winded bird and enjoy the pleasure of me own company."

His back against the water-tank, he could not walk to ward off the drowsiness that was borne on the wings of the soft night wind all laden with the smells of trees and earth and hay-fields. His vigilance relaxed and his thoughts drifted away to other climes and places.

He came out of his revery with a sudden start, convinced that he had been caught napping, for his eyes had failed to detect anything moving in the direction of the barn. But he could hear some one groping about close to the side of the building. A stick snapped, the bushes rustled, and there were other sounds very small yet significant. Captain Michael O'Shea gingerly forsook the little platform and began to slide down the roof, fairly digging his fingers and toes into the shingles with the tenacity of a cat.

The overhanging eaves made it difficult to ob-

serve what was going on below. In order to peep over the edge of the roof, the shipmaster was compelled to sprawl upon his stomach with his heels higher than his head and with no purchase by which to maintain his grip. It was a wide-angled roof or he would have tobogganed off into space before his laborious descent carried him as far as the eaves. However, in his trade a man who could not hang on by his eyelids was a lubber of a sailor, and the bold O'Shea wriggled into position an inch at a time.

The mysterious noises might have been made by Johnny Kent prowling in search of him, but O'Shea was afraid to call out lest he might frighten away the object of his vigil. His trousers catching on a nail and holding him fast for a moment, he ceased his precarious exertions long enough to listen. This time his ear caught the crackle of crumpling paper and a succession of sharper noises as if some one were breaking dry wood over his knee. He smelt the unmistakable odor of kerosene. Almost directly beneath him, and not more than a dozen feet distant, an attempt was well under way to set fire to Johnny Kent's barn.

With more speed and less caution O'Shea managed to poke his head over the edge of the roof, intending to get his bearings before launching the attack. He found himself directly above a shadowy figure which flitted to the wood-pile and back again with quick, furtive movements. Captain O'Shea had never found himself in a more embarrassing situation. He disliked the idea of letting

go and diving head first, which was the quickest method of coming to close quarters. And even if he should try to turn about and launch himself right end to, he was likely to hit the earth with the deuce and all of a thump and perhaps break his leg on a stick of cord-wood. The ladder by which he had climbed to the roof was on the other side of the building and he had no time to scramble in search of it.

While he hesitated the man beneath him scratched a match. Startled and flurried at sight of this imminent danger, O'Shea let his grip loosen for an instant and the law of gravity solved the problem for him. With a blood-curdling yell he slid over the brink, his fingers clawing wildly at the shingles and the wooden gutter. Head downward he plunged and by rights should have broken his neck. His own theory to explain his survival was that an Irishman always alights on his feet. The fact was that the incendiary stranger happened to be in a stooping posture and O'Shea's head smote him squarely between the shoulders.

Both men rolled over and over like shot rabbits. There followed an interval during which the one took no thought of hostilities, and the other had no interest in flight. O'Shea sat up at length, grunted once or twice, and rubbed his head in a dazed manner. The pile of kindling had been scattered, but a fragment of newspaper was burning and he brought his heel down on it. His quarry now began to realize that his back was not broken and he showed signs

of life. The pair sat glaring at each other, speechless, endeavoring to regain the wind that had been knocked out of them.

As tough as sole-leather was Captain O'Shea, and not to be put out of commission by so trifling a mishap as this. His head was spinning like a top and he felt sick and weak, but he had a job on hand and he meant to finish it. The revolver was missing from his pocket. It had been dislodged by his tumble and it was useless to grope for it in the darkness. By now the other man had found his feet and was moving unsteadily toward the end of the barn. O'Shea made for him and they clinched in a clump of burdocks.

Neither was in the best of condition to make a Homeric combat of it. To O'Shea's dismay he discovered that he had caught a Tartar as collision-proof as himself. He tried to grip the fellow by the throat and to throw him with a heave and a twist, but a pair of arms as muscular as his own flailed him in the face and hammered his ribs. Then the brawny young shipmaster let fly with his fists and broke his knuckles against a jaw which seemed to be made of oak.

"If the both of us was ship-shape we would make a grand fight of it," panted O'Shea with the shadow of a grin. "'Tis no time for etiquette and I will stretch him before he does the same for me."

"Wait till I set my teeth in you," growled his adversary, finding speech for the first time. "I'll tear your windpipe out," and he followed the horrid

threat with a string of oaths that chilled O'Shea's blood, although he had heard profanity over all the seven seas. The accents were so hoarse and savage as to be even more alarming than the words. The shipmaster ceased to regard the fight in the light of a diversion. He was convinced that he had a madman to deal with. Keeping clear, he turned and made for the wood-pile, a few yards distant. Groping for a moment, he was fortunate enough to catch up a four-foot length of hickory sapling, as handy a bludgeon as he could desire.

As if at bay, the other man made no effort to escape during this respite, but lunged after O'Shea, who wheeled in the nick of time and found room to swing his hickory club. It rose and fell only once. The madman toppled over and collapsed among the burdocks.

"He will stay there for a while," said the weary O'Snea. "I caught him fair over the ear, and 'tis a safe bet that I put a dent in him."

Thereupon he turned his lagging footsteps in the direction of the cottage. A lantern came bobbing out of the wood-shed door, and its light revealed the large presence of Johnny Kent simply clad in a flowing night-shirt and a pair of slippers. At discerning O'Shea advancing through the gloom, he shouted:

"Why didn't you wake me up at eight bells? I just come to and turned out to look for you, Cap'n Mike. All quiet, I suppose?"

"Yes. I made it quiet, you sleepy old terrapin," returned O'Shea with a laugh before they had come

together. "Didn't you hear me yell when I fell off the barn roof?"

"Nary a yell. I do sleep sounder than when I was at sea," and Johnny Kent waddled nearer and held the lantern higher. "Gracious saints, what have you been doin' to yourself? Your nose is all bloodied up and one eye is bunged. What do you mean by falling off my barn roof? You must have tapped that barrel of hard cider in the cellar."

"I tapped a harder customer than that, Johnny. It was a gorgeous shindy while it lasted, but I had to wind it up. I caught your fire-bug and I laid him out in the barn-yard. Ye can hold a wake over him or send for the police."

The engineer swung his lantern in excited circles as he pranced toward the barn, unmindful of the chilly breeze that played about his bare shanks.

"You're not jokin', are you, Cap'n Mike? The situation is too blamed serious for that. You landed him, honest? You're the man to turn the trick. Where did you ketch him?"

"I got the drop on him, as ye might say, and it was a divil of a drop. My neck is an inch shorter than it was, but me collision bulkhead held fast. He is a broth of a boy, and he will be hard to hold when he comes out of the trance I put him in."

"And I missed the fun," mourned Johnny. "I'm surely getting old, Cap'n Mike. But I guess we can handle him without sending for the village constable to-night."

"I have seen you tame some pretty tough tarriers.

This is a bad one and no mistake. Fetch the lantern closer and we will look him over."

They ploughed through the burdocks, the prickly burrs causing Johnny Kent to stride high and wide. The stranger lay as he had fallen. The light revealed him as a powerfully built man of middle age with reddish hair and a stubbled growth of beard. The dilapidated shirt and trousers were stained with earth and grass, and held together by a leather belt. His captors were about to scrutinize him more closely when he opened his eyes, groaned, and raised himself upon his elbow with an unexpected display of vitality. Bidding Johnny Kent stand by with the lantern, O'Shea caught up the hickory club and flourished it as a hint that unconditional surrender was advisable.

The prisoner blinked stupidly at the lantern and made no effort to rise. His aspect was not in the least ferocious. O'Shea could scarcely believe that this was the madman who had threatened to sink his teeth in him and discommode his windpipe. Rough-featured he was and unkempt beyond words, but he conveyed a most incongruous impression of kindly and harmless simplicity, and O'Shea was the more amazed to hear him mutter in his hoarse, curiously thickened accents:

"Can you spare a chew of tobacco, shipmate?"

"Well, I'll be jiggered," exclaimed Johnny Kent, absently feeling for his trousers' pockets which were not there. "You certainly did tame him a whole lot, Cap'n Mike."

"'Tis a riddle I cannot fathom at all," was the reply.

Indignation got the upper hand of the engineer's generous impulse and he explosively demanded of the stranger:

"What do you mean by tryin' to set fire to my barn, you addle-headed, misbegotten, murderous son of a sculpin? I wish Cap'n Mike had knocked the block clean off you."

The queer visitor showed no resentment, but smiled in an amiable sort of fashion and rubbed a large, red welt just above his right ear. Never a word did he say, although the twain plied him with questions. His demeanor was as friendly as if they had done him some signal service.

"If you can't talk, maybe ye can walk," gustily shouted O'Shea. "We will clap ye under hatches for to-night and investigate by daylight. We have caught an odd fish this time, Johnny."

"Prod him into the wood-shed and lock him up," grumbled the other. "He's plumb twistified in his mental works, and I can't make head or tail of him."

At a beckoning gesture the prisoner meekly tried to get on his feet, but he had been shorn of his strength and he fell twice before O'Shea and Johnny Kent grasped him by the arms and steered him in the path that led to the cottage. He stumbled along like a drunken man and had to be half-dragged over the low step at the wood-shed door. Calling himself a soft-hearted old fool, the engineer bustled into the

house and dragged forth a spare mattress. O'Shea obtained a lamp in the kitchen, also cold water and a towel to bathe the hurt that his hickory weapon had inflicted.

The red-haired man sat forlornly upon the mattress, leaning against the coal-bin, his hands clasped over his knees. He had the dumb, wistful look of a beaten dog, and his eyes, remarkably blue of color, followed Captain O'Shea with no ill-will, but like one who recognized his master. It was clear enough that he was to be dealt with as a man with a disordered mind, and it was unmanly to hold him accountable for his arson and violence. Attacked unawares in the darkness, there had been provocation for his bestial outbreak, and it was to be concluded that his usual mood was harmless, excepting a fatal fondness for playing with fire.

"I have a strong notion that he is a seafarin' man," said O'Shea, as he gave the captive a stiff drink of whiskey from the bottle kept in the hall cupboard. "Maybe this will buck him up and set his tongue going. That's a sailor's belt he has on, Johnny. And he has the look of it."

The engineer had put his spectacles on his nose and was examining the litter of small objects he had fished out of the man's pockets. One of them was like a leather thong thickened in the middle, and he cried excitedly:

"You're right, Cap'n Mike. Here's a sailor's palm—a sea thimble, and the cuss has mended his clothes with it. See the patch on his shirt, and he

has stitched the holes in his shoes with bits of tarred twine."

"He called me shipmate when he asked for a chew, but many a landlubber uses the word and I did not lay much store by it."

"It's only twenty miles to the Maine coast," said Johnny Kent, "and he may have wandered inland from one of the ports."

"I have a hunch that he didn't come out of a coasting schooner. The beggar has sailed deep water in his time. I wonder if he is hungry. Better introduce him to some grub. He is rounding to, but he has about as much conversation in him as an oyster."

The engineer rummaged in the kitchen and brought out a plate of biscuits, cold bacon, potatoes, and pickles, which the red-haired man ate with an avidity that betokened starvation. The sight moved Johnny Kent almost to tears. The last spark of his animosity was quenched. There was no more awful fate than to be separated from three square meals per day.

"We'll swab the dirt off him and shuck those ragged, rotten clothes before we batten him down for the night," said Johnny. "I can't leave a sailor in this fix, even if he is flighty in the main-top and has tried to smoke out the whole darn neighborhood."

While he departed in search of a shift of raiment, Captain O'Shea removed the man's shirt. At the first tug it tore and came away in his hands. The prisoner had remained sitting in the same posture, but

now he moved and lazily stretched his length upon the mattress, lying on his stomach, his face pillowed against his arm. His hunger satisfied, the desire of sleep had overtaken him, and his heavy breathing told O'Shea that the extraordinary guest had carried his riddle to dream-land.

Johnny Kent had taken the lamp into the house, and the lantern which had been left standing on the floor cast a long, dusky shadow athwart the recumbent figure. The shipmaster stood looking down at the massive shoulders and knotted, hairy arms of the stranger when his attention was fixed by something which caused him to stare as though startled and fascinated and perplexed. The man's broad back bore some kind of a design, an uncouth, sprawling pattern such as no artist in tattooing could ever have traced to please a sailor's fancy.

It was a huge disfigurement composed of bold lines and angles which stood out in black projection against the white skin. Even in the dim light, Captain O'Shea could discern that these rude markings had been done with a purpose, that they composed themselves into a symbol of some sort. They looked as if they had been laid on with a brush, in broad, sweeping strokes which ran the width of the back, and all the way down to the waist. The man could not have made them himself. They were mysterious, sinister.

O'Shea was neither timid nor apt to be caught off his guard, but his pulse fluttered and his mouth felt dry. He was in the presence of something wholly

beyond his ken, baffling his experience. This red-haired derelict, whose wits had forsaken him, brought a message hostile, alien, and remote. Presently O'Shea bethought himself of the lantern and made for it with nervous haste. Holding it close to the back of the sleeping man, he stared with horrified attention and pitying wrath that a human being should have been so maltreated.

The great symbol or design had been slashed in the flesh with strokes of a sword or knife. The edges of the scars stood out in rough ridges. Into the wounds had been rubbed India-ink or some like substance which the process of healing held indelibly fixed. The pattern thus made permanent and conspicuous was that of a character of the Chinese or Japanese language.

Johnny Kent came out of the kitchen and beckoned him. The engineer stood open-mouthed and gazed down at the tremendous ideograph that had been so brutally hacked in human flesh. O'Shea had nothing to say. What was there to say? The thing was there. It spoke for itself. What it meant was an enigma which neither man could in the smallest degree attempt to unravel. When Johnny Kent spoke it was only to voice the obvious fact or two that required no explanation.

"He was chopped and branded proper, wasn't he, Cap'n Mike? And it was done for some devilish purpose. I've knocked about most of the ports in the Orient, but I never heard of anything like this."

"They made a document of him, Johnny. 'Tis Chinese workmanship, I'm thinking. How could a man live through a thing like that? For the love of heaven, look at those scars! They are as wide as me thumb, and some of them are better than a foot long. And they stand out so black and wicked that it gives me the creeps."

"It means something, Cap'n Mike. And it's up to us to find the answer. One of them Chinese characters may tell a whole lot. Their heathen fashion of slingin' a pen is more like drawin' pictures. A few lines and a couple of wriggles all bunched up together and it tells the story."

"And what is this story, Johnny? Answer me that."

"You can search me. It's almighty queer business to happen on my peaceful farm in the State o' Maine."

"Let the poor beggar rest here till morning and then we will consider him some more. I guess we don't want to turn him over to the constable, Johnny."

"Not till we try our hand at translatin' him. I wish I had a Chinese dictionary. Say, Cap'n Mike, you're as welcome as the flowers in spring, but as soon as you set foot on my farm things begin to happen. Trouble is a step-brother of yours. It's like harborin' a stormy petrel."

"'Tis not fair to blackguard me," laughed O'Shea. "You and your neighbors can sleep easy in your beds for I have caught the bogie-man."

"I wish I knew what it is you've caught," sighed the engineer.

O'Shea bent over the sleeping man in order to raise his head and slip underneath it a rolled blanket to serve as a pillow. His fingers chanced to detect on the top of the skull a curious depression or groove over which the red hair was rumpled in a sort of cow-lick. Examination convinced him that this was the result of some violent blow which had fairly dented the bony structure and pressed it down upon the brain.

"That is where he got it," said O'Shea. "And 'tis what made a lunatic of him."

"It looks like they tried to kill him with an axe but he was too tough for 'em, Cap'n Mike. No wonder that crack you gave him over the ear didn't bother him much."

"And whoever it was that put their mark on his back was the same party who caved in his lid or I'm a liar," was the conclusion of Michael O'Shea.

II

THE only inmate of the cottage who slept soundly was the vagabond in the wood-shed. His guardians stood watch and watch as a matter of habit, but the early morning found them both astir and drinking mugs of coffee very hot and strong. Their guest had not moved from his outstretched position on the mattress. He slumbered like a man drugged or ut-

terly exhausted. O'Shea had spread a blanket over his naked back and shoulders partly for warmth, but another motive also prompted him. He wished to hide the cruel disfigurement. It seemed unfeeling to expose it.

Now by daylight he moved on tiptoe to the mattress and twitched the blanket aside. O'Shea had lived among hard men and fought his way through battering circumstances in which physical brutality still survived to uphold the rude old traditions of the sea. But this sight made him wince and shiver, and he did not like to look at it. Covering it with the blanket he fell to wondering, with an intensity of interest that gripped him more and more strongly, what tragedy was concealed behind the curtain of this luckless man's past.

Johnny Kent had agreed that he must be harbored in the cottage for the present. Their surmise that he was a seafarer made it seem a duty to befriend him by all means in their power. To spread the tidings in the village that the pyromaniac had been caught would arouse a storm of anger and resentment. Amid much clamor and disorder he would be handcuffed and tied with ropes and triumphantly lugged to the county jail. The farmers were in no mood to condone his misdeeds on the score of mental irresponsibility. On the other hand, kindly treatment and association with those accustomed to follow the sea might awaken his dormant intelligence and prompt him to reveal something of his shrouded history.

"It's an awkward proposition," sighed Johnny Kent, "but we'll have to work it out somehow. Of course I'm sorry for the poor lunatic that has been man-handled so abominably, and so long as we don't give him matches to play with I guess he's safe to have around. But how can I keep him hid from my neighbors? They're as gossipy and curious as a hoghead of cats."

"I mean to find out who branded him and why," was the vehement assertion of Captain O'Shea.

Shortly after this the stalwart waif in the woodshed awakened and his captors were pleased to note that he was still tractable. Indeed, he greeted them with his confiding, good-natured grin and sat pulling on his shoes. To their words of greeting, however, he made no reply. Apparently the plaintive request for a chew of tobacco had been the end of his conversation.

"He used up all the language in his system," commented O'Shea. "Maybe he will not burst into speech again unless I hit him another crack over the ear."

Johnny Kent filled a tub with water and indicated the clean clothes which he had left on the chair. The derelict nodded gratefully and the others withdrew.

"It wouldn't do to trust him with a razor, Cap'n Mike," said the engineer.

"Pooh! Fetch me the tackle and I will shave him meself. It will make him look saner anyhow and I want to see what he is like."

The guest seemed delighted with this thoughtful attention and submitted to a dose of lather with all the good grace in the world. Bathed, shaved, clad in one of Johnny Kent's white suits, he was astonishingly transformed. A strapping big man he was, and he held himself with the easy poise of one whose muscles had been trained by hard work on rolling decks. Strolling into the kitchen, he passed through it and entered the other rooms, his guardians following to see what he might do.

At sight of the scrubbed floors, the polished brass-work, the barometer on the wall, and the simple furnishings so like the cabin of a ship, his blue eyes showed a flicker of interest and he paused and absently shoved an inkstand back from the shelf of a desk lest it slide off. The trick was so significant of his calling that O'Shea needed no more proof. A tin box filled with matches caught his glance and he instantly made for them. His demeanor was furtive and cunning. He had become a different man in a twinkling.

Johnny Kent jumped for him and O'Shea was at his elbow ready for a tussle. But he permitted the matches to be taken from him without resistance, and forgot all about them in fingering the spliced hammock ropes on the porch. A gesture from O'Shea and he returned to the kitchen and took the chair assigned him for breakfast. The prudent engineer kept an eye on the knife and fork which the stranger used with the manners rather of the cabin than the fore-castle. O'Shea studied the rugged, honest features

of this red-headed mystery and earnestly expounded various theories that wandered into blind alleys and led nowhere at all. The only conjecture which seemed to hang together was that, in some way or another, the man's propensity for setting fires harked back to the time and scene of the terrible blow over the head which had benumbed his memory and jarred his wits. Before this disaster overtook him he must have been a fellow ready and courageous, able to hold his own in the rough-and-tumble world.

"What shall we call him? It'll be handy to give him some kind of a name," suggested Johnny Kent.

"He reminds me of Big Bill Maguire, that was mate of the *Sea Bird* bark, and fell through a hatch and broke his neck when he came aboard drunk at Valparaiso. He was a rare seaman when sober."

"Let's call him Bill Maguire, then, Cap'n Mike. He likes us and I guess he intends to sign on with us and hang around."

"Why don't you try setting him to work, Johnny? He would make a jewel of a hired man."

"Yes. On a fire-proof farm that was insured for all the underwriters would stand for," dubiously returned the engineer. "I can't watch him every minute."

Captain Michael O'Shea banged the table with his fist and decisively exclaimed:

"'Tis in my mind to visit you a day or two longer, Johnny. Curiosity is fair consuming me. I can see the ugly, wicked marks on this poor beggar's

back whenever I shut me eyes. It haunts me like a nightmare that is too monstrous to talk about."

"I'd give a thousand dollars to fathom it," roared Johnny Kent. "And Bill Maguire just sits across the table and grins like a wooden figger-head."

"I suppose ye have no Chinamen in your village," ventured O'Shea.

"Nary a Chink. I'll bet the children never saw one."

"And where could we find the nearest one, Johnny? 'Tis our business to dig up a cock-eyed lad that will impart to us the meaning of the message that was carved into the back of Bill Maguire. Nor will I know an easy minute till we have the information."

Johnny pondered a little and then spoke up with sudden hopefulness:

"Once in a while I'm so sagacious that I surprise myself. The Chinese ambassador spends his summers on the coast at Poplar Cove. It's no more than an hour from here by train. He's a fat, sociable old party, so they tell me. And where could you find a better man to solve the riddle of Bill Maguire?"

"You score a bull's-eye," cried O'Shea. "And he will have secretaries and such, and we will let them all have a try at it."

"But how will you show 'em Bill's back? Draw it on paper, or get a photograph made?"

"Nonsense! Bill will take his back along with us. We will produce the original human document."

The engineer was inclined to object to this, but the edicts of Captain O'Shea were to be obeyed, and

to argue was to waste words. The Perkins boy was summoned from the barn and instructed, by means of thundering intonations, to stand guard over the farm at peril of his life. He spent his nights at his own home and had missed the excitement of the capture of Bill Maguire, wherefore the secret was safely hid from his inquisitive eyes and ears. He gazed at the robust, silent stranger with rampant curiosity, but learned nothing beyond the fact that his employer proposed to be absent for the day with his two guests.

The young Perkins drove them to the railroad station in the two-seated democrat wagon, Johnny Kent sitting at his side and smothering his questions. The ticklish business of conveying Bill Maguire through the village was accomplished without the slightest mishap. He behaved with flawless dignity and seemed contented with the society of his escort. During the brief journey by train to Poplar Cove he slouched in his seat as if half-asleep until the railroad swung across a wide belt of salt marsh and turned in a northerly direction to follow the coast. There were glimpses of rocky headlands fringed with surf, of wooded inlets and white beaches, and now and then a patch of blue ocean and a far-distant sky-line.

The red-haired man from nowhere was mightily moved by the smell and sight of the sea. His heavy, listless manner vanished. His rugged face became more intelligent, more alert. It reflected tides of emotion, poignant and profound. It was painful to

watch him as he scowled and chewed his lip or brushed away tears that came brimming to his eyes. It was evident that he struggled with memories and associations that came and fled like tormenting ghosts before he could lay hold of them. Again, for a moment, he broke the bonds of his dumbness, and loudly uttered the words:

"Make for the boat. Don't mind me. The swine have done for me."

To O'Shea and Johnny Kent the words were like a flash of lightning against the black background of night. They revealed the man for what he had been in his prime, in the full stature of heroic self-abnegation, thinking of others and not of himself even in the last extremity. They understood this kind of manhood. It squared with their own creed. Aglow with sympathy, they plied the derelict with eager questions, but he only muttered, wearily shook his head, and turned away to gaze at the sea.

At the Poplar Cove station they hired a carriage and were driven along the cliff road to the pretentious summer-place occupied by His Excellency Hao Su Ting and his silk-robed retinue. To escort a crazy sailor into the august presence of the distinguished diplomat, and demand a translation of the brand upon his naked back was an extraordinary performance, taking it by and large. However, the stout old engineer had no notion of hanging back. He had the fine quality of courage that is not afraid of ridicule.

As for Captain O'Shea, he was in a wicked temper,

and it would fare ill with the man that laughed at him. His smouldering indignation at the barbarity inflicted upon the seaman had been just now kindled by the words which leaped so vividly out of the clouded past and were winged with so much significance. "Bill Maguire" had unflinchingly played the cards as the fates dealt them and had paid a price as bitter as death. The game was unfinished, the account had not been settled. At this moment O'Shea detested the entire Chinese race and would have gladly choked the ambassador in a bight of his own pigtail.

The trio walked slowly across the wide lawn and drew near to the rambling white house of a colonial design to which the Chinese dignitary had transferred his exotic household. It was for O'Shea to explain the fantastic errand and gain admittance, wherefore he prepared to dissemble his hostile emotions and make use of that tact and suavity which had carried him over many rough places.

Alas for his plan of campaign! It was overturned in a twinkling. The red-haired sailor followed obediently to the pillared portico which framed the entrance of the house. O'Shea rang the bell, and his quick ear detected the soft shuffle of felt-soled shoes. The door was swung open and there confronted them a Chinese servant in the dress of his country. At sight of the shaven head, the immobile, ivory-hued countenance, and the flowing garments of white and blue, the demented sailor became instantly enraged. Snarling, he leaped forward with clinched fists

and his face was black with hatred. The wary O'Shea was too quick for him and managed to thrust him to one side so that his rush collided with the casing of the door. The frightened servant squealed and scuttled back into the house. Instead of trying to pursue him, the red-haired man was taken with a violent fit of trembling, seemingly compounded of weakness and terror. Before O'Shea and Johnny Kent could collect their wits in this extremely awkward situation, he wheeled about, dashed between them, and made for the lawn as if the devil were at his heels.

O'Shea was after him like a shot, the engineer puffing along in the wake of the chase. The servant's outcries had alarmed the household. Out of the front-door came spilling a surprising number of sleek attachés, secretaries, domestics, and what not. Behind them waddled at a gait more leisurely none other than His Excellency Hao Su Ting in all the gorgeous amplitude of his mandarin's garb. In a chattering group they paused to watch poor Bill Maguire flee with tremendous strides in the direction of the roadway, the active figure of Captain O'Shea steadily gaining on him. Far in the rear labored the mighty bulk of Johnny Kent.

The fugitive was not in the best of trim for a sustained effort, and he tired rapidly, swaying from side to side as he ran. Near the outermost boundary of the ambassador's grounds, O'Shea was able to overtake and trip him. Maguire fell headlong, ploughing up the turf, and was so dazed and breathless that

O'Shea was kneeling upon him and shoving a revolver in his face before he could pull himself together. Then Johnny Kent came up, and between them they subdued the man's struggles to renew his flight.

He made no effort to name either of them. His befogged mind seemed to recognize them as his friends and protectors. The one impelling purpose was to escape from the Chinese. These latter gentlemen now came hurrying over the lawn to offer aid, evidently surmising that a madman had broken away from his keepers and possibly had sought the place to harm His Excellency. Poor Maguire groaned pitifully and renewed his exertions to release himself, but the weight of two uncommonly strong men pinioned him to the sod. At a word from the ambassador several of his retinue hastened to sit upon the captive's arms and legs. A dapper young secretary acted as spokesman and inquired in precise, cultivated English:

"May I trouble you to inform His Excellency why you make all this commotion on his premises? It is an insane person, or perhaps a burglar, that you have in your custody?"

"It is an American seafarin' man and he is a friend of ours," gravely answered Captain O'Shea, still keeping a firm grip on the prostrate Maguire. "He has behaved himself very well till now, but he is impolite enough to dislike the Chinese."

"He is not correct in the intellect? Then why have you brought him here?" asked the secretary.

"To show him to His Excellency," quoth O'Shea. "'Tis information we seek, and the man himself is the document in the case."

"He turned obstreperous most unexpected and sudden," anxiously put in Johnny Kent, "and now it's blamed unhandy to show him to you. I'm kind of stumped. What about it, Cap'n Mike?"

The secretary might have looked puzzled had he belonged to any other race, but his face remained polite and inscrutable as he smoothly protested:

"Your explanation is not clear. I advise you to remove all yourselves from the premises of His Excellency. He has no interest in you."

O'Shea was oblivious of the absurd tableau in which he played the leading rôle. The red-haired sailor was still stretched upon the grass, and his brace of stanch friends held him at anchor. He was quieter and the tempest of passion had passed. The Chinese servants who had been roosting on the outlying parts of his frame withdrew from the scene of war and rejoined their comrades. As soon as they were beyond the range of his vision, Maguire subsided and seemed as docile as of yore.

His Excellency 'Hao Su Ting showed his august back to the turbulent intruders and paced slowly toward the house. Several of the party turned to follow him, but the secretary aforesaid, together with a few of the staff, tarried in order to be sure that the trio of invaders left the place. Captain Michael O'Shea was not to be thwarted by the disadvantageous situation in which he found himself.

Hustling Maguire to his feet, he tried to drive it into him with strong words and meaning gestures that he must be obedient and no harm would come to him. The revolver was an eloquent argument in itself.

Sensible Johnny Kent turned the sailor about so that he could see nothing of the Chinese and was facing the cliffs and the sea. In this position the engineer held him, while O'Shea, seizing the opportune moment, fairly ripped the coat off the man and pulled up his shirt to bare his back. It was dramatically done and the effect was instantaneous. Not a word was said in explanation. None was needed. The great Chinese character that spread between the man's shoulder-blades and down to his waist, showed black and scarred and livid.

The secretary and the other Orientals stood gazing at it without moving so much as a finger. They said nothing, but one heard their breath come quick. A kind of whistling sigh escaped the dapper secretary, and his eyes glittered like two buttons of jet. He was striving to maintain a composure which had been racked to the foundations. His blood was of a finer strain than that of the underlings who stood near him, and he held his ground while they began to edge away in retreat. Presently one of them broke into a run. The others took to their heels in a panic route and scampered toward the house, their baggy breeches fluttering, queues whipping the wind, felt shoes fairly twinkling. From one of them came back a shrill, wailing, "Ai oh."

They raced past His Excellency Hao Su Ting,

who stood aghast at the gross disregard of etiquette and vainly commanded them to halt. Nor did the mad pace slacken until the last of them had dived to cover. O'Shea forgot his business and grinned with honest enjoyment, but the face of the secretary, now haggard and parchment-like, recalled him to the task in hand. This lone Chinese who had withstood the desire to run away was moving nearer to examine the branded back of the red-haired sailor.

"Ye have all the marks of a man that is sick to the soul with fear," grimly observed O'Shea, "but you are too brave to give up to it, and I admire ye for it. Tell me, have you ever seen a man scarred like that before?"

The secretary spoke with a visible effort, and his voice had the rasping edge of intense excitement.

"Yes, I have seen that character, symbol, whatever you will call it—in my own country. It is most shocking, amazing, to behold it in this way, inflicted upon an American."

"Do you need to look at it any longer? Can ye remember it? Will I show it to His Excellency?" demanded O'Shea.

"I cannot forget it," slowly replied the other. "No, it is not necessary to show it to the ambassador. I assure you it is not necessary. I shall inform him that I have seen it. He will know what it is. I wish very much that it may not be seen by his illustrious self."

The words and manner of the secretary conveyed

the weightiest earnestness. He was in an agony of dread lest Hao Su Ting should return and view the spectacle of the branded man. O'Shea pitied his distress and was shrewd enough to perceive that nothing would be gained by opposing him. Maguire was restless, and Johnny Kent had trouble in sticking fast to him.

"Walk him along toward the railroad station," said O'Shea to his comrade. "He will give you no bother once he makes his offing and goes clear of this Chinese colony. Here's the gun, if ye need to persuade him a bit. Wait for me there, Johnny. This young man from Cathay will have a talk with me."

"It looks as if you had sort of started things, Cap'n Mike. Aye, aye, I'll take Bill in tow and run to moorings with him till you throw up signal rockets."

With this reply, which betokened excellent discipline, the engineer grasped the sailor-man by the arm, and marched him into the road. O'Shea and the secretary were about to resume their conversation when the latter's attention was caught by the beckoning gesture of the Chinese ambassador, who seemed impatient.

"His Excellency wishes to ask me why there was so much unseemly excitement by his servants," said the young man. "I would prefer first to talk with you, but his command must be obeyed. Your name? Thank you. I shall have the pleasure of acquainting Captain O'Shea with the ambassador of China to the United States."

"'Tis no pleasure for any one concerned, to judge by the symptoms," replied the shipmaster.

"I agree with you, my dear sir. But it is something to have spared His Excellency the sight of the disfigurement which is written on the back of your most unfortunate friend."

"Maybe the ambassador could see it from where he stood," suggested O'Shea.

"No. His eyes are not of the best without spectacles. He is not a young man and his health is inferior. To shock him by the sight of something dreadful to see might have unhappy consequences."

"But what is the answer? Why was every man of you bowled off his feet?" exclaimed O'Shea.

"'Tis not the way of your people to be afraid of scars and wounds. Ye deal out some pretty tough punishments to your criminals."

"It is advisable that you should pay your respects to His Excellency," evasively returned the Chinese.

The ambassador regarded Captain O'Shea with an unfriendly stare until the secretary, with many low bows, held rapid converse with the personage in his own language. The elderly statesman and diplomat grunted incredulously, shook his head in vehement contradiction, and O'Shea conjectured that he was roundly scolding the young man for bringing him such an impossible yarn. At length he yielded with a frown of annoyance and briefly addressed the shipmaster.

"I speak not much English. Come into my house, please."

He preceded them into a large library with many long windows screened by bamboo shades. Passing through this, he entered a smaller room more convenient for privacy. The threshold was a boundary between the Occident and the Orient. The library looked, for the most part, as though it belonged in a handsome summer-place of the New England coast, but this smaller room was as foreign as the ambassador himself. The air was heavy with the smell of sandal-wood. The massive table and chairs were of teak and ebony cunningly carved. The walls were hung with embroideries of crimson and gold, on which grotesque dragons writhed in intricate convolutions. The pieces of porcelain, jade, and cloisonné were not many, but they had been fashioned by the artists of dead dynasties and were almost beyond price. Upon a long panel of silk was displayed a row of Chinese characters cut from black velvet and sewn to the fabric. They were merely the symbols of good fortune commonly to be found in such an environment as this, a sort of equivalent of the old-fashioned motto, "God Bless Our Home," but to Captain Michael O'Shea they carried an uncomfortable suggestion of the handiwork done upon the back of Bill Maguire.

His Excellency Hao Su Ting seated himself beside the table, deliberately put on his round spectacles with heavy tortoise-shell rims, and tucked his hands inside his flowing sleeves. The deferential secretary stood waiting for him to speak. O'Shea fidgeted and yearned to break the silence. The air

had turned chill with an east wind that blew strong and damp from the sea. Nevertheless the ambassador found it necessary to take a handkerchief from his sleeve and wipe the little beads of perspiration from his bald brow. O'Shea made note of it, and wondered what powerful emotion moved behind the round spectacles and calm, benignant countenance of the diplomat.

At length he spoke to the secretary in Chinese and indicated O'Shea with a slow wave of the hand. The young man translated with some unreadiness as though endeavoring to bring the words within the bounds of courtesy.

"His Excellency says that it is impossible, that you are mistaken. He is not convinced."

"He calls me a liar?" and O'Shea's sense of humor was stirred. With his easy, boyish laugh he added: "'Tis your own reputation for veracity that needs overhaulin', me lad. Your own two eyes have seen the thing. I had the proof, but ye would not let me take the two-legged document by the collar and fetch him to the house."

The ambassador turned to the table at his elbow. Upon it was an ink box and a soft brush used for writing his own language. From a drawer he withdrew a sheet of rice-paper. Shoving these toward O'Shea, he said something and the secretary explained:

"He wishes you to write what it is like, the thing that I also have seen. Please be good enough to oblige."

The brand was etched in O'Shea's memory. Without hesitation he picked up the brush and blazoned the character in broad, firm strokes. For perhaps a minute His Excellency gazed at it. Then he caught up the sheet of rice-paper and tore it into small fragments.

"He is now convinced that you and I speak truth," the secretary murmured in O'Shea's ear.

"Well and good. He looks as if it made him unwell. Now can we get down to business and tackle the mystery of it? It is Chinese writing. What does it mean? That is me errand."

His Excellency Hao Su Ting no longer resembled a round-faced Buddha seated in reposeful meditation upon a throne of teak-wood. The words came from him in a torrential flow, and the harsh, sing-song intonations were terribly in earnest. It was a harangue that warned, expostulated, lamented with all the fervor of an issue that concerned life and death. It startled O'Shea to behold a man of his unemotional race, and one so hedged about with the dignity of rank, in this stormy tide of feeling. It ceased abruptly. The old man sank into his chair and closed his eyes. The secretary rang a gong for a servant and ordered tea. Presently the ambassador signified that he wished to retire to a couch, and others of his staff attended him into the library and thence to an upper floor of the house.

The secretary returned to join O'Shea and began to explain in his measured, monotonous way:

"I will now inform you as much as it is permitted

to know. It disappoints you, I am aware, that his Excellency is unable to translate the writing character which has made so much disturbance. Nor can I translate it, either into Chinese or English words. My language is what you call arbitrary, built up of symbols, not letters. This particular character has been invented to signify some secret purpose. It has the root-sign for *man*, and also the two curved lines which mean a *sending*, a *message*. The rest of it is hidden from us. His Excellency is a scholar of the highest grade among the literati of China. This character, as a whole, he has never been able to find in the classics or the dictionaries."

More puzzled than ever, O'Shea broke in to demand:

"But if nobody knows what it means, why does the sight of it start a full-sized panic?"

"Many men in China have been found dead, and upon their backs had been hacked with a sword this strange character. It was thus that the own brother of His Excellency was discovered, in the court-yard of his house."

"I begin to see daylight," said O'Shea.

"Ah, there is only the blackest darkness," gravely replied the secretary. "The branded men have not been coolies, but officials, merchants, people of station. No precautions avail. It smites them like the lightning from the sky. The fear of it walks everywhere. And now it has crossed the sea like an evil shadow."

"That is not quite right," was the matter-of-fact

comment. "Poor Bill Maguire got it in China and brought it with him. 'Tis not likely to trouble you."

"Never have we heard of a man who lived and walked with this mark upon his back, Captain O'Shea. All those to whom this fate has happened were infallibly dead. When they beheld it this afternoon, some of our people believed they gazed upon a red-haired ghost. I am an educated man, a graduate of Oxford University, but I tell you my blood turned to water and my heart was squeezed tight."

"My friend Maguire is hard to kill," said O'Shea. "I tried it meself. So he was put on the list by this damnable whatever-it-is, and the autograph was carved on him, and he was left for dead! Can ye tell me any more?"

"It is not in my power to enlighten you. I have known of men who found this character painted on the posts of their gate-ways. They surrounded themselves with soldiers and hired guards. They moved not from within their own walls. And they could not save themselves. They died as I have described it to you."

"I have listened to pleasanter yarns. I am greatly obliged to ye," and O'Shea was ready to take his departure. "I am afraid I will know no more unless Bill Maguire uncorks himself and confides the story of his life."

"When the time comes it will interest me greatly to be informed of it," said the secretary, offering his hand.

"Pass me kind regards to His Excellency and give

him my regrets that I jolted his nervous system. He is a fine old gentleman."

The shipmaster hastened on foot to the railroad station, where Johnny Kent was patiently and peacefully awaiting orders. The red-haired sailor was sitting on a baggage truck and munching peanuts. At sight of O'Shea he grinned in recognition and waved a greeting hand. The engineer was eager for tidings, but a train was almost due and he was briefly assured:

"'Tis a bugaboo tale, Johnny, and we will digest it at our leisure. And how has Bill behaved himself?"

"As good as gold, Cap'n Mike. But there's something goin' on inside him. His eye looks brighter and he has mumbled to himself several times. I dunno whether he's primin' himself for another explosion or kind of rememberin' himself in spots. Anyhow, he has symptoms."

"We will steer him home as soon as we can, Johnny. He has enjoyed an exciting afternoon."

The locomotive whistled and a few minutes later they filed into the smoking-car. O'Shea fished out a black cigar and his comrade rammed a charge of cut plug into his old clay pipe. No sooner had they lighted matches than their irresponsible protégé reached over and snatched them away. Instead of trying to set fire to the car or to the abundant whiskers of the old gentleman across the aisle he flung the matches on the floor and stamped them with his heel. His guardians regarded him with puz-

zled surprise, and were not quick enough to restrain him before he surged among the passengers and plucked from their faces every lighted cigar, cigarette, and pipe. These he rudely made way with by grinding them under his feet or tossing them through the wind.

The persons thus outraged were for assaulting him until they perceived the width of his shoulders, the depth of his chest, and the color of his hair. The shipmaster and the engineer tackled him like a brace of foot-ball players, yanked him back to his seat, and calmed the ruffled travellers with explanations and offers to pay damages. The blue eye of Bill Maguire was alertly roving to detect the first sign of smoke, and during the remainder of his journey no one dared to burn the hazy incense of tobacco.

"You're a great man for theories, Cap'n Mike," quoth the bewildered engineer. "Can you figger what's happened to Bill?"

"I am on a lee shore this time, Johnny. I would call him a firebug no longer. He has turned himself into a fire department."

"That's precisely it," excitedly cried the other. "And here's how I explain it. He's had some mighty violent experiences during the last twenty-four hours, what with your tryin' to knock his head off and runnin' him afoul of those Chinamen which is his pet aversion. His intellect has jarred a mite loose from its dead centre, but one cog slipped into reverse gear. In place of settin' fires, he wants to put 'em

out. His machinery ain't adjusted right, but it's movin'. Instead of starting ahead on this conflagration theory of his, he goes full speed astern."

"You are a knowing old barnacle," admiringly exclaimed O'Shea. "This ought to make Bill an easier problem to handle. The strain of keeping up with him begins to tell on me."

"Pshaw, Cap'n Mike, I'll set him to work on the farm if this latest spell sticks to him."

They drove home from the village in the twilight. The Perkins boy had tarried to do the chores and kindle a fire for supper. He fled without his hat when the big, silent, red-haired stranger marched into the kitchen, halted to look at the blazing grate, and promptly caught up a pail of water from the sink and flooded the stove. Johnny Kent entered a moment later and gazed aghast at the dripping, sizzling embers. Then his common-sense got the better of his annoyance and he shouted to O'Shea:

"Bill's gear is still reversed. Coax him out on the porch and hold him there while I get supper. He just put the stove awash."

O'Shea laughed and took charge of the derelict, while Johnny locked the kitchen doors and windows and rekindled the fire. Freed from the fear that the cottage and barn might go up in smoke, the comrades enjoyed a quiet evening. Maguire was disposed of in the attic bedroom and insisted on going to bed in the dark.

"He will not wander away," said O'Shea. "His wits are in a sad mess, but he knows he has found a friendly anchorage."

They felt the need of sleep, and Johnny Kent was yawning before he had heard the end of the interview with His Excellency Hao Su Ting. It entertained him, but the edge of his interest was blunted. The hapless sailor in the attic had been struck down and mutilated by some secret organization of Chinese assassins, and there was no finding out the meaning of the brand upon his back. It was their trademark. This was explanation enough. It satisfied the engineer's curiosity. He had no great amount of imagination, and although he was ready to share his last dollar with the helpless Maguire, he felt no further call to pursue the mystery of his wrongs.

Captain O'Shea was very differently affected. He had not forsaken the quest of adventure. His soul was not content with cabbages and cows. The world beyond the horizon was always calling in his ears. As children are fond of fairy-stories, so his fancy was lured by the bizarre, the unexpected, the unknown. Your true adventurer is, after all, only a boy who has never grown up. His desires are wholly unreasonable and he sets a scandalous example. If you had asked him the question, this rattle-headed shipmaster would have frankly answered that nothing could give him more enjoyment than to sail for China and try to discover how and why the brand had been put on Maguire. Besides, he had an Irishman's habit of taking over another man's quarrel.

"Poor Bill cannot square it himself," reflected O'Shea. "'Tis the duty of some one to undertake

it for him. It makes an honest man's blood boil to think of the black wickedness that was done to him. As long as the heathen are contented to murder one another 'tis no business of mine. But an American sailorman—and maybe he is not the only one."

When he went downstairs in the morning, Johnny Kent was in the barricaded kitchen and Maguire paced the porch with the air of a man physically refreshed. He paid no heed to O'Shea, who was amazed to discover that he was talking to himself. The sounds he made were no longer inarticulate, but words and fragments of sentences curiously jumbled. In the stress of great excitement he had previously spoken with brief coherence, only to lapse into dumbness. Now, however, with no sudden stimulus to flash a ray of light into his darkened mind, he was beginning to find himself, to grope for expression like a child painfully and clumsily learning to read. To the listening O'Shea it sounded like heaping phrases together in a basket and fishing them out at random.

The sailor's voice had lost much of its harshness. Its tones were rather deep and pleasant. Swinging his long arms as he walked, he kept repeating such disjointed ideas as these:

"Heave her short—eleven dollars Mex—no, Paddy Blake—a big wax doll—all clear forward, sir—stinking river—roll the dice—the painted joss—a year from home—way enough—Wang Li Fu—die like rats—sampan, ahoy—no more drinks—good-by,

Mary dear—in the paint locker—the head-devil-fish and potatoes.”

It made O'Shea feel dizzy to listen to this interminable nonsense, but he followed it most attentively, and stole behind a lilac-bush lest Maguire should spy him and be diverted from his mad soliloquy. For some time there was no catching hold of a clew, but at length the shrewd shipmaster began to sift out certain phrases which were emphasized by reiteration. They were, in a way, the *motif* of the jargon, hinting of impressions most clearly stamped on the man's mind.

He mentioned again and again "*the painted joss*," and occasionally coupled it with reference to "*the stinking river*." Stress seemed to be laid also on the proper name *Wang Li Fu*. Many of the other fragments O'Shea discarded as worthless. Some of them related to routine duties on shipboard. He hazarded a guess that the sailor was a married man. At any rate, he had left a "Mary dear," and it was a plausible conjecture that he had promised to bring home "a big wax doll."

When Maguire became silent O'Shea made for the kitchen and hammered on the door.

"Is that you, Cap'n Mike?" responded the perturbed accents of Johnny Kent. "If it's Bill, he can stay out till breakfast's cooked. I don't want my stove drowned again."

Reassured, he cautiously admitted the shipmaster who pounded him on the back and shouted:

"Bill has been leakin' language from every pore.

'Tis all snarled up most comical, but I seem to get hold of a loose end now and then."

"Hooray, Cap'n Mike! It's just as I said. When you hit him over the ear it sort of jarred his brain loose. It ain't fetched clear yet, but he's begun to make steam in his crazy fashion. What does he say?"

"Wait till I tow him in to breakfast and maybe he will start up again."

But Maguire ate in silence and O'Shea could not persuade him to pick up the rambling monologue. Johnny Kent therefore escorted the sailor to the garden, gave him a hoe, and thriftily set him to work. He fell to with the greatest good-will and showed an aptitude which betokened an earlier acquaintance with this form of husbandry.

After a discussion of some length the engineer exclaimed:

"You're a bright man, Cap'n Mike, but you haven't knocked around the Chinese ports as much as I have. Bill mentioned one or two things that I can elucidate. Paddy Blake, eh? So he knows Paddy Blake. The blackguard runs a sailors' rum-shop in Shanghai. It's just off the Bund, as you turn up the street that's next to the French Concession. I've rolled the dice for drinks there myself and blown my wages and mixed up in some free-for-all fights that would have done your heart good."

"'Tis a glimpse into the fog, Johnny. Maybe this rapscaillon of a Paddy Blake would know poor old Bill if he had a description of him. We can guess

at some of the rest of it. Bill went up a Chinese river somewhere and got in black trouble ashore. It had to do with a temple and a joss."

"One of them big carved wooden idols, Cap'n Mike, painted all red and yellow and white."

"And it looks to me as if he stumbled into a headquarters of this bunch of thugs that has been dealing out sudden death to prominent Chinese citizens, Johnny. Anyhow, he ran afoul of some kind of a 'head-devil,' as he calls it, and was left for dead."

"Then it's possible that Bill knows the secret of this organization of cock-eyed murderers," excitedly cried the engineer.

"The same notion is in me own mind," replied O'Shea.

A dusty man just then rode a bicycle into the door-yard and dismounted to give the shipmaster a yellow envelope.

"I guess you're Captain Michael O'Shea," said he. "The station agent got this telegram for you and asked me to stop and deliver it, seein' as I was passin' this way. How are you, Mr. Kent? Seen anything of that pesky firebug? I see you've got a new hired man in the garden."

"I'm thankful to say the firebug is letting me alone," gravely answered the engineer.

"I cal'late he heard the selectmen had offered a reward for him and he lit out of this neighborhood."

The messenger departed, and Captain O'Shea, glancing at the telegram, crumpled it in his fist and vouchsafed with a laugh:

"'Tis from the man in New York, the agent in charge of that voyage to the Persian Gulf. For political reasons the job is postponed a matter of six months or so, and maybe it will be declared off altogether. The charter is cancelled and my contract along with it."

"I suppose you're disappointed," sympathetically began Johnny Kent.

"Not so I shed tears. Something else will turn up. And 'tis me chance to take a vacation, Johnny. Thanks to our salvage job with the *Alsatian* liner, I have more money than is good for me."

"Now's your chance to buy that next farm and get it under way," and the portly mariner was elated.

O'Shea eyed his comrade as if suspecting that he shared the melancholy affliction of Bill Maguire.

"You mean well, Johnny," said he, "but you are subject to delusions. I will enjoy a vacation after me own heart. With the money that burns holes in me pockets, I will go frolickin' out to China and do me best to find out what happened to Bill Maguire. I suppose I cannot coax ye to go with me."

"Pshaw, Cap'n Mike!" and the honest farmer looked surprised. "I've engaged a gang of men to begin cuttin' my hay next week. And who's to look after poor old Bill? I can't seem to beat it into your head that I've turned respectable. The wilder the job, the better you like it."

"I have taken quite a fancy to this one," and O'Shea's eyes were dancing. "It has been haunting me, in a way, ever since I caught sight of the

cruel brand and listened to the yarn of those Chinese gentlemen. As one seafarin' man to another, I will do what I can to square the account of Bill Maguire."

"It's the first time I ever laid down on you," sighed Johnny Kent.

"I do not hold it against ye," warmly returned Captain O'Shea. "And maybe you ought to stand watch over Bill. It would be cruel to lug him out to China, for the sight of a pigtail gives him acute fits. And he would turn crazier than ever. Well, I will go it alone this time, Johnny. 'Tis a most foolish adventure, and by the same token it pleases me a lot."

III

STEAMERS flying the flags of many nations were anchored in the Woosung River off the water-front of Shanghai. High-pooped junks tacked past them and cargo lighters manned by half-naked coolies drifted with the muddy tide. In a handsome, solidly fashioned perspective extended the European quarter of the city, as unlike the real China as London or New York. Turbanned Sikh policemen, tall and dignified, in soldierly khaki and puttees, strolled through the clean, well-paved streets. English, French, and German merchants clad in white were spun around corners in 'rickshaws pulled by sweating natives muscled like race-horses. Tourists lounged on the piazzas of the Astor House or explored the shops filled with things rare and curious.

Unseen and unperceived was the native city of Shanghai, incredibly filthy and overcrowded, containing a half-million souls within its lantern-hung streets and paper-walled tenements.

Near the river, at the end of the English quarter farthest removed from the parks and pretentious hotels, was a row of small, shabby brick buildings which might have belonged in Wapping or the Ratcliff Road. There was nothing picturesquely foreign about them or their environment. Two or three were sailors' lodging-houses, and another was the tumultuous tavern ruled over by Paddy Blake. Here seafarers swore in many tongues and got drunk each in his own fashion, but Paddy Blake treated them all alike. When their wages were gone he threw them out or bundled them off to ships that needed men, and took his blood-money like the thorough-going crimp that he was.

On this night the place was well filled. A versatile cabin steward off a Pacific liner was lustily thumping the battered tin pan of a piano. Six couples of hairy seamen, British and Norwegian, were waltzing with so much earnestness that the floor was cleared as by a hurricane. Cards and dice engaged the attention of several groups seated about the tables by the wall. In blurred outline, as discerned through the fog of tobacco smoke, a score of patrons lined the bar and bought bad rum with good coin. For the moment peace reigned and never a fist was raised.

Captain Michael O'Shea sauntered in during this

calm between storms. The dingy room and its sordid amusements had a familiar aspect. It was precisely like the resorts of other seaports as he had known them during his wild young years before the mast. The bar-tender was a pasty-faced youth who replied to O'Shea's interrogation concerning Paddy Blake:

"The old man has stepped out for a couple of hours. He had a bit of business aboard a vessel in the stream. Will you wait for him? If you're lookin' for able seamen he can find 'em for you."

"I have no doubt of it," said O'Shea, "and he will bring them aboard feet first. Fetch me a bottle of ginger-ale to the table in the corner yonder and I will wait awhile."

The wall of the room was broken by a small alcove which made a nook a little apart from the playful mariners. Here O'Shea smoked his pipe and sipped his glass and was diverted by the noisy talk of ships and ports. At a small table near by sat a man, also alone, who appeared to be in a most melancholy frame of mind. Discouragement was written on his stolid, reddened face, in the wrinkles of the worn gray tweed clothes, in the battered shape of the slouch hat.

O'Shea surmised that he was a beach-comber who had seen better days, and surveyed him with some curiosity, for the man wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, his lip quivered, and once he was unable to suppress an audible sob. To find a sturdily built man of middle-age weeping alone in a corner of a

sailor's grog-shop led one to conclude that alcohol had made him maudlin. But he did not look intoxicated, although dissipation had left its marks on him. O'Shea conjectured that he might be suffering the aftermath of a spree which had broken his nerves and left him weak and womanish. In such a pitiable plight, the contemplation of his own woes had moved him to tears.

Tactfully waiting until the man had recovered his self-control, O'Shea nodded with a cordial smile and indicated a chair at his own table. The stranger shifted his place with a certain eagerness, as if he were anxious to be rid of his own miserable company. His tremulous hands and the twitching muscles of his face prompted O'Shea to say:

"Will you have something with me? I dislike sitting by meself."

"A small drink of brandy, if you please. I am trying to taper off. God knows I welcome the chance to talk to somebody that is clean and sober."

The man's heavy, morose eyes regarded the shipmaster approvingly. Presently he began to talk with fluent coherence, in a kind of headlong manner. He felt that he had found a kindly listener and seemed afraid that O'Shea might desert him before the tale was done.

"I am on the beach and all to pieces again, as you may have guessed," said he. "My name is McDougal, late of the American Trading Company, but I couldn't hold the job. This time I went to smash in Tientsin. It was queer how it happened.

I had been sober and making good for nearly six months. Ever see a Chinese execution? Well, this was an extraordinary affair. A high official of the province had been condemned for treason, and the government decided to make a spectacle of him as a sort of public warning. The place was the big yard of the governor's yamen. I joined the crowd that looked on. First came a covered cart with black curtains. A strapping big Manchu crawled out of it. He was the executioner, and a dingy apron covered with dark-red blotches hung from his chin to his toes.

"Then came a second cart, and in it rode an old gentleman who climbed out and walked alone to the cleared space in the middle of the yard. He was bent and feeble, but he never flinched, and his dignity and rank stood out as plain as print. A guard said something to him, and he took off his long, fur-trimmed coat and knelt on the filthy flagging and the wind whirled the dust in his face. He knelt there, waiting, for a long time, motionless except when he put his hand to his throat and pulled his collar around it to keep off the wind.

"A pompous official read the death sentence, but that wrinkled old face showed never a trace of emotion. Then a pair of the executioner's understrappers leaped on the old gentleman like wild-cats. One jumped on his back and drove his knees into him, while the other tied a bit of cord to the end of the trailing queue and yanked forward with all his might. It stretched the old man's neck like a turtle's. Then

the big Manchu with the bloody apron raised his straight-edged sword and it fell like a flash of light. The head flew off and bounced into the lap of the fellow that was tugging at the queue."

McDougal paused for a gulp of brandy. His voice was unsteady as he resumed:

"I guess my nerves were none too good. A man can't go boozing up and down the coast of the Orient for a dozen years without paying the price. That sight was too much for me. I had to take a drink, and then some more, to forget it. The old man was so patient and helpless, his head bounced off like an apple; and what broke me up worst of all was seeing him pull that coat up around his throat so he wouldn't catch cold—up around his throat, mind you. It was a little thing, but, my God, what did it matter if he caught cold? And the way they hauled and yanked him about before his neck was—well, I wish I hadn't seen it.

"Once started, the old thirst took hold of me and I wandered down the coast until I came to, sick and broke, in a dirty Chinese tea-house in Che-Foo. There I lay until one day there came from the street a long, booming cry that crashed through the high-pitched clatter of the crowd like surf on a granite shore. By Jove! it stirred me like a battle-chant. It sounded again and again. I knew it must be a pedler shouting his wares, you understand, but it surged into my poor sick brain as if it was meant for me. It was buoyant, big, telling me to take heart in the last ditch. The words were Chinese, of

course, but the odd thing about it was that they came to me precisely as though this great, deep voice was booming in English: '*Throw-w all-l re-grets away-y.*'

"I presume I was a bit delirious at times, but this was what I heard very clearly, and it helped me wonderfully. As soon as I got on my legs I looked for the pedler until I found him, and followed him through the streets. Even at close range his call seemed to be telling me to throw all regrets away. It was summoning me to make a new start, do you see? He was a giant of a fellow in ragged blue clothes, a yoke across his broad shoulders with many dangling flat baskets. When he swelled his chest and opened his mouth the air trembled with that tremendous call of his. I trailed him to his tiny mud-walled house, and we got quite chummy. I could speak his dialect fairly well. He earned ten or fifteen cents a day and supported a family of nine people by selling roasted watermelon seeds. He sang loud because he had a big voice, he said, and because his heart was honest and he owed no man anything. He did a lot to help me get a grip on myself, and some day I mean to do something for him.

"I had somehow hung on to my watch, and I sold it and beat my way to Shanghai in a trading steamer, and here I am, shaky and no good to anybody, but I still hear that cheerful pedler thundering at me to throw all regrets away. One has some curious experiences on this coast, and I have had many of them——"

A hand gripped McDougal's shoulder, and he turned, with a nervous start, to confront a hale, well-dressed mariner with a yellow beard, whose eyes twinkled merrily as he loudly exclaimed:

"It vas mein old pal what I haf last met at Port Arthur. Ho, ho, McDougal, how goes it mit you?"

The speaker drew up a chair, pounded on the table to summon a waiter, and told him:

"A bundle of trinks, *schell*, or I bite you in two."

"I'm delighted to see you again, Captain Spreckels," stammered McDougal, at which O'Shea introduced himself, and the mariner explained with a jolly laugh:

"McDougal vas a king among men. We haf met only one hour in Port Arthur when I haf told him things what was locked so deep in my bosom dot they haf never before come up. Perhaps we vas not so sober as now, so? What you do with yourself, McDougal? American Trading Company yet already?"

"I am on the beach, Captain Spreckels, and not fit to work at anything for a while."

The skipper appeared vastly disturbed. Stroking his beard, he reflected for a moment and then shouted:

"My bark, *Wilhelmina Augusta*, sails for Hamburg to-morrow morning early. She is now at the mouth of the river. I vas come up in a tug to find if Paddy Blake haf three more men for me. McDougal, you comes mit me. It vas the great idea, eh? The sea-voyage will do you so much good you will not know yourself. I vish to haf your good

company. My cabin is as big as a house. It will cost you noddings. If you want to come out East again, I can bring you back next voyage. Listen! Give me no arguments. You vas seedy and down on your luck."

McDougal lacked the will power to resist this masterful mandate. And perhaps here was a fighting chance providentially offered. On the sweet, clean sea, far from the dissolute ports which had wrecked his manhood, he might build up health and strength and throw all regrets away. A fit of nervous weakness made the tears spring to his eyes, and he faltered unevenly:

"You quite bowl me off my feet, Captain Spreckels. I haven't thought of leaving the East. But I will go with you and I can never thank you enough. About clothes and an outfit, I——"

"I haf more clothes than a plenty for two of us, McDougal. There is beer but no whiskey in my vessel. I do not trink liquor at sea. Come. Paddy Blake haf left word mit his man here dot my sailors vas already sent to the landing mit a boarding-house runner. We will go aboard the tug."

With this, the energetic master mariner tossed down a gin rickey, said adieu to Captain O'Shea, and whisked McDougal out of the place with an arm across his shoulders. The episode made O'Shea feel slightly bewildered. The unfortunate McDougal had appeared and vanished with an abruptness that savored of unreality. His confession was the sort of thing that might come to a man in a night-

mare. McDougal had painted the scenes with a few broad strokes, and yet as O'Shea sat musing, they seemed astonishingly vivid: the aged Chinese official pulling his coat about his neck just before his head bounced off like a bloody ball—the ragged colossus of a street pedler flinging afar his resonant call—McDougal, wretched and forlorn, huddled in the tea-house and fighting off the horrors. He had opened the book of his life and let O'Shea read a page of it, but there must have been many more worth knowing.

These reflections were interrupted by a violent dissension in the vicinity of the bar. A British tar smote a Scandinavian over the head with a bottle and stretched him on the floor. Somebody plucked the piano stool from under the musical cabin steward and hurled it at the aggressor. The missile flew high and swept the bar-tender into his glassware with a most splendid crash. Then hostilities became general.

The combatants were too busy to observe the entrance of a wizened, clerical-looking little man in a black frock-coat and a rusty tall hat. With a shrill whoop, he pulled a slung-shot from his pocket and pranced into the thick of the scrimmage. He was as agile as a jumping-jack, his coat-tails seemed to be flying in a dozen places at once, and whenever his weapon landed a seaman promptly lost all interest in the row and made for the street with his head tenderly held in his hands. In the wake of the active little man peace hovered like a dove.

With magical celerity the floor was cleared of disorder, and the promoter of harmony calmly assisted the damaged bar-tender to clear away the wreckage. Captain O'Shea accosted him when the task was finished.

"Paddy Blake is me name," the little man replied in a jerky, rasping voice, cocking his head to one side. "The boys will have their fun and I hope they didn't annoy ye. The place will be quiet for a bit. What can I do for ye?"

"'Tis a matter of private business," answered O'Shea.

"Then come into the back room, where we can be sociable. I take ye for a shipmaster."

"Right you are; but I have no ship at present. You might call me a tourist."

Paddy Blake briskly led the way to a cubby-hole of a room with a very strong door, which he made fast with a bolt. There was a window whose shutters were of iron. O'Shea suspected that fuddled seamen might be tucked in here for safe-keeping when the occasion required. The two Irishmen studied each other with a kind of cheerful, candid appraisal. Each recognized in the other certain qualities to be admired. Paddy Blake was a hardened old ruffian, but he was a two-fisted little man with the courage of a terrier.

"I have come a long way to find you," said O'Shea. "And it was imparted to me that the business that has brought me to China had best be discussed in whispers. 'Tis a mighty queer yarn——"

"Ye need not fill and back. Steam ahead. I like your looks," broke in Paddy Blake. "Whatever passes bechune us stays inside the door. Are ye in throuble?"

"Not me. This is about a friend of mine. Tell me, Paddy Blake, and think hard. Do ye recall a strappin' big man with red hair and blue eyes and a deep voice that used to roll the dice in your place? Hold a minute; I have not done with him. One front tooth was broken so you would notice it when he talked. And he had a crooked little finger that must have stuck out when he held a glass or waved his hand about."

Paddy Blake puckered his brows and pinched his long upper lip between a grimy thumb and forefinger.

"What was he—a Yankee?" he asked, sitting straighter in his chair and gazing at the shipmaster with puzzled, groping interest.

"He was an American seafarin' man—a mate most likely. You could not forget him if you cast eyes on him only once. Yankee sailors are scarce in deep-water ports. This one should stick out in your recollection like a light-house in a fog."

"A whale of a man with a red head and an eye as blue as a bit of the Inland Sea!" vehemently exclaimed Paddy Blake. "And when was he in me place? How long ago was it?"

"'Tis yourself that must answer that question. At a guess, it was more than a year ago."

The spry little man bounded to his feet and

clutched the tails of his coat with both hands as he bent forward with his face close to O'Shea's and rasped out:

"He has popped into me head like a flash. And a mushy-brained dunce I was not to know him at once. Eldridge ye mean—Jim Eldridge, that was mate in the China Navigation Company's steamer *Tai Yan*, chartered to run coastwise. A whoppin' big beggar he was, but mild-mannered and good-hearted, the quietest red-headed man that iver I saw in me life."

"Are you sure of that?" demanded O'Shea. "Could you swear to it?"

"I remimber him as plain as I see you," testily returned Paddy Blake. "He was not in me place often. 'Twas too rough for him."

"And did you ever chance to hear what had become of him?"

The little man tapped O'Shea's arm with an eloquent finger and replied in lower tones:

"It comes back to me that there was a yarn about him. 'Twas gossip, ye understand, nawthin' that ye could put your finger on. Shanghai is a great place for wild stories. The Shanghai liar is a special breed, and he is famous all over the world. Annyhow, there was a voyage of the *Tai Yan* steamer when he didn't come to port in her. Shortly after that she broke her back on a reef in the Formosa Channel and all hands was lost, so I never heard anny news from her people about this Jim Eldridge."

"That was most unfortunate," said O'Shea; "but

I am in great luck to get track of the man at all. And have you anybody in mind that might have known Eldridge when he was sailing on this coast?"

The volatile Paddy Blake who saw so many mariners pass through his place during the year was mentally sifting his recollections which were many and confusing. The big red-headed man had steered clear of rum and riot and was no steady frequenter of this unholy resort. Obviously he had made no more than a passing impression on Paddy Blake, but the old man was honestly anxious to splice the broken ends of the story, and after painful cogitation he broke out again:

"There is one man that ye should find by all means. He may be dead by now, for the liquor had harrd hold of him. I have not seen or heard of him in a long while, but he wint north from here. I mind the last time he come in me place. Pretty well pickled he was, and some o' the lads were yarnin' with him, and there was talk of this Jim Eldridge. Be gob! 'twas then I heard the queer gossip, in bits, d' ye see? There had been a ruction somewheres up beyant"—and Paddy Blake waved a hand to the northward—"and this man I mintion had been mixed in it with Jim Eldridge. But when they would urge him to unwind the story he would turn ugly and shut up like an oyster, half-seas-over though he was. He was a' great one for messin' about among the Chinese, and could patter two or three dialects. A scholar and gentleman was McDougal."

"McDougal!" roared O'Shea, taken all aback by the coincidence. "Why, man alive, this same McDougal was in your place to-night and left not an hour ago. He has just come down the coast, from Tientsin and Che-Foc."

"'Tis a pity ye let him get away. If he wanders into the Chinese city amongst some of thim native friends of his 'twill be the divil and all to find him again. So he's still alive!"

"I sat and talked with him and he discoursed nightmares."

"He has lived thim," said Paddy Blake.

"I had him and I lost him," was O'Shea's melancholy exclamation. "An oakum-whiskered Dutchman by the name of Spreckels breezed in under full sail and welcomed this McDougal like a long-lost brother, and carried him off to sea before ye could blink. It was comical. And I sat there like a wooden figure-head and let him go."

"In the *Wilhelmina Augusta*—four-masted steel bark bound out to Hamburg. It was a lucky stroke for McDougal."

"And most unlucky for me," sighed O'Shea. Then he pulled himself together, and spoke in his hearty, masterful way. "Come along, Paddy Blake, and find me a tug. We will chase McDougal down river for the sake of a conversation with him."

"Captain Spreckels had the *Arrow*, and she's fast," said Paddy Blake. "He has a good start of ye, and his bark will be ready to sail as soon as he boards her."

"Then we'll chase him out to sea. I have come too far to lose McDougal by letting him slip through me fingers," and the demeanor of Captain Michael O'Shea discouraged further argument.

Paddy Blake jammed the tall hat on the back of his head, unbolted the door, and whisked through the bar-room with such speed that the shipmaster's long strides could hardly keep up with him. They turned into the street that led to the water-front and hastened to a lighted corner of the bund where stood several 'rickshaws. Paddy darted at the drowsy coolies who were squatted on the pavement, cuffed a couple of them, and gave an order in pidgin English. They jumped into the shafts, the passengers climbed aboard, and the vehicles went spinning along the thoroughfare.

As they drew abreast of the lights of the anchored shipping, Paddy Blake looked along the landing-berths of the smaller steamers and exclaimed with an explosion of profane surprise:

"There's a tug in the pocket where the *Arrow* ties up. I can't see to make her out in the dark, but we will stop and take a look. Something or other may have delayed Captain Spreckels. I hope to blazes thim seamen I sint him has not hooked it before he got 'em safe aboard the bark."

Leaving the 'rickshaws to wait orders, they footed it down to the wharf and were convinced that they had found the *Arrow* even before she could be clearly made out. The darkness was shattered by the troubled accents of Captain Spreckels, who was proclaiming to the skipper of the tug:

"By Gott, I cannot wait for McDougal no longer. The tide ist turned already. My wessel must go to sea mit the morning flood. It gives me sadness to lose dot scalawag, but he has runned away mit himself."

O'Shea climbed over the guard-rail and cried:

"How are you again, Captain Spreckels? What's this I hear about McDougal? I am after finding him meself."

The master of the *Wilhelmina Augusta* swung his arms and made answer:

"McDougal was a slippery customer, so? I haf a immense fondness for him. By the landing here he left me to go in a 'rickshaw, *sehr schnell*, to a room what he haf hired for to-night und fetch some little t'ings what belonged to him, mostly books und some papers mit writings on 'em. He haf come to Shanghai, he tells me, mit a small bundle which he never loses, drunk or sober. While the tug is makin' steam und haulin' her lines aboard he will do his errand. It vas an hour ago. I do not understand, but I must not wait."

"Changed his mind," suggested Paddy Blake. "Sorry ye are shy a shipmate, but the news will please me friend Captain O'Shea here. You lose. He wins."

The hull of the *Arrow* was trembling to the thresh of the screw, and her skipper was bawling the order to cast off. Captain Spreckels shouted farewell as the two visitors jumped ashore, and the tug moved astern into the fair-way. As they walked toward the 'rickshaws O'Shea remarked:

"'Tis no use to go rummagin' around to-night in search of McDougal, I suppose."

"No, but I will find him for ye to-morrow," replied Paddy Blake. "If he has a room in the English quarter ye can gamble he will drop into my place. If he don't I will find a bright lad to round him up. 'Tis easy findin' him as long as he is not livin' in the native city. What do ye suppose become of him, annyhow?"

"Maybe he flinched from the notion of quitting the East. When it gets in the blood of these tropical tramps, the grip of it is not easy to break."

"And he lost his nerve at the last minute," said Paddy Blake. "I've seen cases like it. I'm that way meself."

Declining a cordial invitation to have a "night-cap," O'Shea told his 'rickshaw cooly to take him to the Astor House. It seemed extraordinary that his quixotic pilgrimage should have so soon disclosed the identity of the derelict who had drifted into the comfortable haven of Johnny Kent's farm. This, however, did not greatly astonish O'Shea, who knew that the steps of sailormen in alien ports are not apt to stray far from the water-side. The singular feature of the business was that he should run across the sodden beach-comber, McDougal, who was the needle in a hay-stack of prodigious size. The hand of destiny was in it.

At breakfast next morning Captain O'Shea enjoyed overhearing the talk of a party of American tourists at a near-by table. In their turn the

younger women did not fail to observe with interest the clean-cut, resolute shipmaster smartly turned out in fresh white clothes. After they had left the dining-room he picked up a copy of *The Shanghai Mercury* and carelessly turned to the shipping news where these lines caught his eye:

Bark *Wilhelmina Augusta*, Spreckels master, cleared for Hamburg with general cargo. Sailed Woosung this A. M.

This turned his thoughts to McDougal and he was impatient to find Paddy Blake and begin the search. He was about to toss the newspaper aside when a paragraph seemed to jump from the page and hit him between the eyes. He read it slowly, his lips moving as if he were spelling out the words:

UNKNOWN EUROPEAN MYSTERIOUSLY KILLED

Late last night the body of a middle-aged man was discovered in the Rue Pechili by an officer of the French municipal police. The place was only a few yards from one of the gate-ways of the native city wall in a quarter which is largely populated by Chinese who have overflowed into the French quarter. The man had been dead only a short time. He is supposed to have been an American or Englishman, although his identity was unknown at the hour of going to press. He was clothed in gray tweeds badly worn and had the appearance of one who had suffered from dissipation. He had been stabbed from behind, in addition to which his body was savagely gashed and mutilated. The British police were notified and Inspector Burke immediately took charge of the case.

Captain O'Shea's second cup of coffee stood cold and neglected while he continued to gaze abstract-

edly at the front page of *The Shanghai Mercury*. He was reading between the printed lines. His sun-browned face had paled a trifle. He was not afraid, but he was conscious of that same feeling of physical abhorrence which had taken hold of him when he first beheld the scarred and branded back of the man dubbed Bill Maguire.

He was absolutely certain that he could identify the "unknown European" found dead near a gateway of the native city. It was McDougal, and he had been slain because in some manner, as yet unrevealed, he had played a part in the tragic mystery of the red-haired sailor. Intuition welded the circumstances together. With this premise O'Shea framed one swift conclusion after another. McDougal had suddenly veered from his purpose of going to sea with Captain Spreckels. With the morbid impulse of a man whose nerves were shattered by drink, he had been afraid lest the German skipper might find him and carry him off whether or no. Therefore he had fled to cover, making for the native city where he doubtless had Chinese friends. Perhaps he had been watched and followed by hostile agents from the moment he landed in Shanghai.

"I have seen others like him," said O'Shea to himself. "They will run from their own shadows, and their friends can do nothing with them. And I must be getting a bit flighty meself or I would not sit here and take for granted things that are no more than guesswork. How do I know that the

dead man is McDougal? The answer is this: 'Tis one of me strong hunches, and they seldom go wrong."

He passed out of the dining-room and delayed in the office of the hotel to ask a question of the clerk. The atmosphere of the place was so wholly European that the China, with which O'Shea had come darkly, gropingly in touch, seemed almost as far away as when he had been on the farm in Maine. The clerk went to the porch and gave instructions to a 'rickshaw cooly, and Captain O'Shea rattled off to the headquarters buildings of the English police. A Sikh orderly conducted him into the small room where Inspector Burke sat at a desk scanning a file of reports. He was a tall, dark, soldierly man of about forty. The slim-waisted khaki tunic, the riding-breeches, and the polished brown puttees gave him the air of a dashing trooper of light-horse. Glancing at O'Shea's card, he nodded pleasantly and said with a singularly winning smile:

"And what can I do for Captain Michael O'Shea, of New York? I am very much at your service."

"'Tis about the man that was found murdered close by the native city last night," was the reply.

"Ah, by Jove!" exclaimed the inspector, and his pencil tapped the desk with a quick tattoo. "An odd case, that! Most unusual. I was pot .rin' about on it a good part of the night. My men report that he was in Paddy Blake's place during the evening, but the old rip denies knowing him, of course. He wants to steer clear of the case. I'm

rather stumped so far. You are at the Astor House? I fancy I saw you there at dinner last night."

"Right you are, sir. I am more than a little interested in this dead man," pursued O'Shea in a straightforward manner. "And I will first describe him to ye," which he proceeded to do with the detail of an observer whose eye was keen and memory retentive.

"That's the Johnny, to a dot," cried Inspector Burke, alertly interested. "And when did you last see him?"

"I talked with him last night, but before we go further I will prove an alibi," hastily answered O'Shea, suddenly realizing that his position in the matter might look compromising.

"Don't trouble yourself," was the easy assurance. "You are jolly well out of it and satisfactorily accounted for. This was a native job, not a bit of doubt of it. Suppose we take a look at the body. It is packed in ice in the go-down just back of this building. Your identification must go on the records, you know. Then we can have a chin-chin, and I hope you'll be good enough to stay for tiffin with me."

O'Shea took from an inside pocket of his coat a leather bill-case and drew therefrom a sheet of heavy paper folded several times. Spread out, it covered half the desk. Upon it he had drawn with a brush and stencilling ink a life-size reproduction of the great Chinese character that scarred and discolored the back of the red-haired sailor,

Inspector Burke flung his cigarette aside with a quick gesture and stared first at the desk and then at O'Shea. His pleasant composure was evidently disturbed, and he spoke abruptly.

"My word! You know a lot more about this job than I do. Where the deuce did you get that? The poor beggar that was butchered last night had the mark on him."

"I know he did, Inspector Burke. I was sure of it when I read about the thing in the newspaper this morning."

They went into the shed and viewed what was left of the ill-fated McDougal, who had tried, too late, to throw all regrets away and make a new start at the difficult business of existence. O'Shea was keenly distressed. The man had won his sympathy. He would have liked to befriend him. Inspector Burke said kindly:

"Did you know him at all well? He must have amounted to something once. Was he ever a chum of yours?"

"I never laid eyes on him till last evening in Paddy Blake's," answered O'Shea. "And now I will sit down with ye and spin the yarn of the sailorman that I called Bill Maguire for convenience."

The inspector listened gravely, nodding comprehendingly now and then as if his own experience might have crossed the trail of the same story. When O'Shea ceased talking, his comment was as follows:

"Most extraordinary! I fancy we can help each

other a bit. But, mind you, I don't pretend to know much about this mysterious murder society that goes about choppin' people up. I have heard of it, of course, but until now its activities have been confined to the Chinese. We don't pretend to police the native city. The Chinese governor runs his own show. There are native detectives on my staff, but their work is mostly in the foreign municipality. The case of this McDougal is the first of its kind. And I rather think you have supplied the motive. He knew too much."

"But what did he know?" demanded O'Shea. "There was this sailor by the right name of Jim Eldridge, ye understand. He got his in the same way. They were mixed up together at one time or another."

Inspector Burke withdrew from a drawer of his desk a large envelope and emptied out several torn sheets and fragments of paper which looked as though they had been trampled under foot. Some were covered with handwriting in English, while others held columns of Chinese characters. They were so mud-stained and crumpled, however, that only a few lines here and there were at all legible. O'Shea gazed at them eagerly, surmising what they were before the inspector explained:

"My men picked them up in the street where McDougal's body was found."

"Yes. He must have had a bundle of books and papers under his arm, for I heard mention of the same," cried O'Shea. "Like enough, it was ripped

apart in the scrimmage and the blood-thirsty heathen made off with whatever they could lay their hands on in a hurry. If they spied any Chinese writing they would grab at it. What do ye say, Inspector Burke?"

"There are bits of some sort of a diary here, Captain O'Shea, and odds and ends that only a native could make head or tail of. I looked them over early this morning, and one of my Chinese did what he could to help. It is impossible to arrange the fragments in any sequence, but the story you tell me dovetails rather curiously with some of the sentences."

"There was many queer things stowed away in that noddle of his," said O'Shea, "and he was an educated man, so he would be apt to make notes of them. And does he make any mention at all of this Jim Eldridge, alias Bill Maguire?"

Inspector Burke carefully smoothed a torn sheet of paper and laid a finger on a few lines scrawled in a shaky hand. They held no reference to the sailor, but several phrases were startlingly familiar to Captain O'Shea. The mutilated passage ran thus:

Very horrid dreams last night—brandy failed to drive them away. Was in a steamer on the Stinking River—the Painted Joss came through the cabin port-hole, squeezing itself small as if made of rubber, and then expanding to gigantic size. It strangled me slowly, making hideous faces. This is a warning—When I dream of the Painted Joss, I am on the edge of seeing things while awake. The fear of violent death is. . . .

Captain O'Shea was vividly reminded of the disjointed monologue of Bill Maguire, who had shown symptoms of a similar antipathy to the "Painted Joss."

"McDougal wrote down the Stinking River as if it was a real name," he said to Inspector Burke. "I thought Maguire called it that because it smelled bad. If it is on the map, can ye locate it, and is there by any chance a town with the title of Wang-Li-Fu on the banks of the same?"

Inspector Burke summoned a fat, drowsy-looking interpreter and put several questions to him. After poring over an atlas for some time, this owlish Chinese gentleman vouchsafed the information that a navigable stream known as the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells did indeed flow through a coastwise part of Kiangsu province, emptying into the wide estuary of the old mouth of the Yellow River. There was a city in that region which had been great and flourishing until the Tai-Ping Rebellion laid it in ruins. It was now no more than a wretched hamlet, although in local usage it had retained the name of Wang-Li-Fu, the last syllable of which signified a chief city of a province.

"I say, this is interesting," exclaimed Inspector Burke. "I am inclined to think that you and I have picked up a warm scent, Captain O'Shea. And here's another bit of paper we can manage to read."

They pored over a muddy page of McDougal's diary and discovered, alas! that it was no more than

a fragment of a little Chinese farce called "The Mender of Broken China-ware." McDougal had picked it up from some troupe of strolling players and jotted down a rough translation of his own, beginning:

"Seeking a livelihood by the work of my hands,
Daily do I traverse the streets of the city.
Well, here I am, a mender of broken jars,
An unfortunate victim of ever-changing plans.
To repair fractured jars is my sole occupation.
'Tis even so. Disconsolate am I, Niu-Chau."

The two investigators laid this page aside and scanned the remaining scraps of paper. The Chinese writing consisted almost wholly of quotations, lines from the classics, racy proverbs of the common people, and so on. They contained nothing whatever that might throw more light on the mystery of McDougal. In much the same way, what he had written in English concerned itself with his wanderings from port to port and his pitiful failures to hold a position.

"What we want most was lost in the scuffle," said O'Shea. "The earlier part of this diary may have told the story that you and I are anxious to know."

"I fancy we know more than any other two white men in China," drawled Inspector Burke. "If a chap is really keen to find out something about this blackguardly organization, he will make a voyage to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells and go pokin' about the ruined town of Wang-Li-Fu."

It's out of my bailiwick. Now, whether I ought to lay this information before the Chinese officials of the provincial government——"

"Excuse me for meddling," O'Shea broke in with a boyish, eager smile, "but I have come a long way to go rummagin' about in this mess on me own hook. And do ye think the Chinese government could be trusted to go ahead and accomplish anything at all? This evidence of ours is no more than guesswork."

"I have thought of that, Captain O'Shea. And the thing would not be done quietly. There would be a lot of chin-chin and clumsy preparation, and a gun-boat and pig-tailed soldiers, and Shanghai getting wind of the expedition. It would be better to do the trick off one's own bat."

"My friend, the sailorman with the cracked top, remarked most emphatic about the 'Head Devil' when he was spillin' disconnected language," thoughtfully observed O'Shea. "'Tis me strong opinion that he tangled himself with the main works of this busy fraternity of man-killers."

"What are your plans, may I ask? You are welcome to all the information my men may pick up in the native city. What a lark! I wish I might get a leave of absence and go with you."

"I would ask no better partner," warmly returned O'Shea. "Well, I will buy charts and study the coast of this Kiangsu province and learn what I can about the inland waters. And then I will find a few good men that will go to hell for wages, and fight for the love of it. And I will charter a steamer

that 's fit to navigate rivers and we will be what you might call an expedition."

Inspector Burke gripped the hard hand of Captain O'Shea and exclaimed with a laugh:

"Here's luck to you! My word, but you're the most refreshin' man I've met since I came off frontier service in India! I will help you find your men. Nothing easier. Shanghai can furnish you gentlemanly remittance men from England, stranded American soldiers from Manila, time-expired blue-jackets from Hong-Kong, broken shipmasters from God knows where, and assorted scamps who will follow any one that will buy the drinks."

"'Tis cheerful news, Inspector Burke. I will have a council of war with you to-morrow at this time. I wish that you would see that poor McDougal is buried decent in a Christian church-yard and I will be glad to pay the bills. He was a good man once."

IV

THAT same evening Captain O'Shea remained in his room at the hotel until after nine o'clock. For one thing, he wrote a long letter to Johnny Kent, acquainting that doughty farmer with the encouraging progress of the enterprise, which promised "to deal out enough trouble to satisfy any reasonable man." Then he took his letter of credit from the leather bill-book and made sundry calculations. After leaving Inspector Burke he had rambled along

the water-front and made random inquiries concerning charter prices. Freights were low and the river trade was dull. His funds could stand the strain. Fighting men of the kind he wanted were cheap and he would ship coolies as stokers and deckhands. However, O'Shea was ready to see the thing through if it took his last penny. What man with blood in him wouldn't be glad to pay the price of such a picnic as this?

Having jotted down his estimates of the cost of coal, stores, wages, arms, and so on, he cocked an eye at the total and said to himself:

"'Tis the first time I ever backed an expedition of me own, and was not pulling some one else's irons out of the fire. I feel like the minister of war of a revolutionary government."

Gathering up his papers, he was about to restore them to the leather wallet when he caught sight of the folded sheet containing the great Chinese character which he had displayed to Inspector Burke. It was not a thing to be carried about carelessly and perhaps exposed to view in the course of his business dealings with banks or shops or shipping agents. Some association with this sinister symbol had cost poor McDougal his life. And Chinese were to be found everywhere in the European settlement. With an unusually prudent impulse, Captain O'Shea thrust the folded paper between the layers of clothing in his trunk and put the key in his pocket.

The night was young, the air warm and close within doors, and he felt not in the least like turning

in. Strolling through the wide corridors, he passed into the street and moved idly in the direction of the Bund, attracted by the music of a band which was playing in the park near by. The place was like a lovely garden with wide areas of lawn and a profusion of foliage. The large number of men and women who walked to and fro or chatted in groups were, for the most part, English, American, and German; exiles of a fashionable and prosperous air who appeared to find life in the Far East quite endurable and success in their commercial enterprises not harassingly difficult.

Captain O'Shea found a seat on a rustic bench and watched the passing show. Presently he smiled as he descried the incongruous figure of a wizened little elderly Irishman in a black frock-coat with a rusty tall hat firmly jammed on the back of his head. In this smart company Paddy Blake was a fish out of water, but he had lost not a bit of his brisk, devil-may-care demeanor which dared any one to tread on the tail of the coat aforesaid. O'Shea hailed him, and he halted to cackle cordially:

"I was lookin' for ye to drop into me place all day. There was a magnum on ice and a brace of cold roast Chinese pheasants that 'ud make a king lick his chops. I had something important to impart to ye in th' back room."

"'Twas about McDougal, no doubt," said O'Shea. "I found him, and dead as a mackerel he was."

"I had the same news this mornin'," exclaimed Paddy Blake. "One of me Chinese bar-boys lives

in the native city forninst the French Gate. He was bound home last night whin the body was found, but the likes of him 'ud scuttle away and say nawthin' to the police."

"Inspector Burke tells me that you were not too free with information yourself," dryly observed O'Shea.

Paddy Blake vehemently thumped his knee with his tall hat and returned:

"Me place has a bad enough reputation, God knows, and the damned British police is biassed agin me. Would it do me anny good to be dragged into court as witness in a murder case and th' inspector makin' out that the man got drunk on my booze? Which is wrong entirely, for McDougal was sober when he went off in tow of Captain Spreckels, as ye well know. But 'tis no use holdin' post-mortems. Thim Chinese divils done for McDougal same as he was afraid of. And are ye makin' anny headway in the matter of the big red-headed man that I informed ye was Jim Eldridge, mate of the *Tai Yan* steamer?"

"I will not find easy weather of it without McDougal," said O'Shea, who had no intention of showing his hand to Paddy Blake.

An electric lamp illuminated the path in front of them, but a large tree cast a shadow past one end of the bench, which was why they did not sooner perceive a young man who stood scanning the crowd as if he had nothing more to do than listen to the music. Now he stepped into the light and was about to

move on when he caught sight of the tall hat of old Paddy Blake. As though recognizing this ancient landmark, he made a mock pass at it with his lacquered stick and exclaimed in accents easily familiar:

"Hello, old sport! I was betting you the price of a new hat on the arrival of the German mail-boat last week. You won, Paddy, but why do you not wear the new hat?"

O'Shea was surveying the jocular young man with considerable interest. Here was a type new to him—the dapper, *blasé*, slangy Chinese of Shanghai, wearing European clothes and manners, ardent patron of the club and the race-track, and forsaking his countrymen to live in a foreign-built villa on the Bubbling Well Road. An English tailor and an English haberdasher had adorned this young man regardless of expense, but O'Shea surmised that he was something more than a gilded rounder. He looked quick-witted and efficient and very wise in worldly knowledge. Moreover, there was an odd quality of respect in the manner of the unterrified Paddy Blake as he replied to the greeting.

"An' what's the good worrd, Charley? Can I do annything at all for ye? I am waitin' to buy a hat with your money whin this one wears out. 'Tis a shame to toss it away. I want ye to know Captain O'Shea, a seafarin' friend of mine from New York. Captain, this is Misther Charley Tong Sin, comprador for Jordan, Margetson & Co., an' the smartest comprador that ye will find between Tientsin and Singapore, if I do say it to his face."

O'Shea shook hands with the affable young man, who laughed and retorted:

"Paddy is a great chap for the blarney, a first-chop jollier, you bet. We do some business together when my firm wants sailors for its ships. Sometimes Paddy beats me; not so often I skin him."

"Listen to him," chuckled the old man. "If iver I got the best of him just once, it 'ud make me too proud to live with. Well, I must be trottin' along to me own dump. I wandered to th' park on the chance of pickin' up a couple of stray sailors. If ye can be of anny service to Captain O'Shea I will count it as a favor, Charley. He's a stranger and he's Irish, and he has made a hit with me."

Paddy Blake departed in great haste, and Charley Tong Sin offered O'Shea a cigarette from an ornately jewelled case, remarking:

"You are in Shanghai for business or pleasure? It is a bully good town for fun; not as swift as New York, but not so slow either. I went to college in America."

"Which is more than I did," confessed O'Shea. "Oh, I am just looking about Shanghai, not to find out how swift the town is, but to invest a bit of money, maybe. Jordan, Margetson? That is a big shipping house?"

"The same. I am in charge of the native business," chirruped Charley Tong Sin. "Anything in the shipping line you want, you come to see me and I will put you wise. You have done business in these ports before, captain?"

"No; mostly in the Atlantic trade. I was in the office of your firm this afternoon, asking some information about a possible charter."

"Ah, but you did not see me. Too bad," and the comprador added with bland self-satisfaction: "It must have been after three o'clock. Then I am in the club drinking gin cocktails every day until I go home to dinner. It is my custom. There is no man in Shanghai that does more business and drinks more gin cocktails, but I do not mix the two things. I am the wise guy, eh? What tonnage do you want to charter, and where to?"

"I am not quite ready to say," replied O'Shea, who preferred to keep his affairs to himself even when offered the assistance of so capable an adviser as Charley Tong Sin.

"I beg your pardon. Come to my office when you have made up your mind, Captain O'Shea. For the sake of the jolly sprees I had in little old New York, I will see that you are not stung in Shanghai. What do you say to a drive on the Bubbling Well Road before you go back to your hotel? My carriage is waiting a little way from here. I came to the park to meet a friend but he has not arrived."

The invitation was attractive and the acquaintance of the comprador worth cultivating. O'Shea accepted with thanks, and presently they climbed into a very shiny victoria with two Chinese grooms on the box. The spirited little horses, admirably matched, danced through the paved streets of the settlement and out into the wider spaces of the countryside.

The shipmaster found pleasure in new places; with him sight-seeing had never lost its zest, and the Bubbling Well Road was one of the things that no voyager to the Orient ought to miss. To view it by night was rather unsatisfactory, but the air was deliciously sweet and cool, and the handsome embowered residences of merchants and diplomats and Chinese officials appeared quite magnificent when duskily discerned by the glimmer of the stars.

"You have seen the native city? No?" said Charley Tong Sin. "It is very dirty, but picturesque to beat the deuce. What you say? To-morrow morning I go to have an appointment with His Excellency, the governor, at his yamen. It is on business. Perhaps you would like to meet me there and have an audience. It is rather good fun, much red-tape, a big bunch of officials, and plenty of kowtowing. Not many foreigners have admittance to him in this way."

It occurred to Captain O'Shea that he should very much like to learn what the government of the native city, or the police department thereof, had discovered in connection with the murder of McDougal. And to gain an entrance in company with the influential comprador, himself a Chinese, was to make his inquiries under the most favorable circumstances.

"I will jump at the chance," he exclaimed. "A man like me that may do business in China in a small way should make himself solid with the powers that be."

"I am sorry that I cannot meet you at your hotel

and take you to the yamen," explained Charley Tong Sin, "but to-morrow I must be very early at my office to make up the accounts of a ship that will sail for Hankow, and then I will have to hurry into the native city like the very devil. If you tell your 'rickshaw man to carry you to the governor's yamen I will be there and see you at eight o'clock."

"I can find my way, and many thanks to you," cordially returned O'Shea. "The native city is strange water, but no doubt the 'rickshaw pilot will know his course."

It was drawing near to midnight when the shiny victoria left Captain O'Shea at the Astor House and the obliging Charley Tong Sin bade him adieu. The shipmaster went yawning to his room, agreeably refreshed by the outing and ready for bed. He was a tidy man by habit, having stowed himself and his belongings for much of his life in a space no larger than a respectable closet. Even in a hotel room he left nothing strewn about.

He had no more than pulled off his coat when he observed that things were not arranged exactly as he had left them. His eyes noted one trifle, and this led him to look for others. The Chinese servant had been in to turn down the bed, leave fresh towels, and pick up burnt matches and scraps of paper, but something other than this routine handwork had been busy in the room. His things had been examined hastily, but with careful endeavor to leave them as they were. Opening one bureau drawer after another, he found confirmation of this sus-

picion. The articles therein had been not so much poked about in disorder as moved from their places by exploring hands.

If a thief had been in the room he found no booty for his pains, for there was neither money nor jewelry to be looted. Captain O'Shea thoughtfully picked up a leather hand-bag which was locked as he had left it. Inserting the key he looked inside. He had been careful to slip a box of revolver cartridges into a leather flap-pocket because the pasteboard covering was broken and they were apt to spill loose in the bottom of the bag. Evidently it had been ransacked, for the box of cartridges was not in the pocket, but lodged in a fold of a rain-coat which half filled the bag. O'Shea whistled softly and moved straightway to his trunk. This also was locked. Flinging back the lid, he instantly searched between the layers of clothing for the folded sheet of heavy paper on which he had drawn with a brush and stencilling ink the ominous Chinese character that was branded into the back of the red-haired sailor-man.

The paper was missing. Something had already told him that he should find it missing. He made no further search, but sat himself down on the edge of the bed and stared very hard at the blank wall. The night was as warm as before, but he felt curiously chilly.

"'Tis like as if some one had jammed an icicle into the small of me back," he reflected. "I will not cry before I am hurt, but there's more to this divertin'

adventure of mine than Johnny Kent and I ever dreamed of on the farm."

Certain conclusions were boldly obvious. His real business in China had been discovered by the same agency which had tried to slay the red-haired sailor and which had murdered McDougal. The paper had been stolen because it was a clinching proof of his active interest and interference, and perhaps also to terrify and intimidate him with the realization that intelligences, hostile and secret, were spying on him. It was futile to try to guess how the knowledge of his purpose had been disclosed. McDougal may have been watched and followed, as O'Shea had already surmised, and they had been seen talking together in Paddy Blake's place. Some listener may have been unseen during the interview at the headquarters of Inspector Burke.

To make complaint, either to the hotel management or to the police, that his room had been entered seemed a silly proceeding. To catch this kind of a thief was as hopeless as chasing a phantom. It was decidedly unpleasant to think of going to sleep in this room, for as Captain Michael O'Shea admitted to himself, with a very serious countenance:

"The lad that did that trick is likely to sift in through the key-hole if he takes the notion and chop the brand into me back after slippin' the knife into me before I can wake up to find out how dead I am. I would like to sleep in the same bed with Inspector Burke and a battery of the Royal Artillery this night, but if I lose me nerve Johnny Kent will disown me entirely."

With this he looked over his defences, like a seasoned campaigner, and assembled the chairs, the crockery, and the large tin bath-tub, together with the heavier articles of his own kit. Two chairs he placed against the door, one balanced on top of the other so that if dislodged they would topple over with a good deal of noise. The cord of the mosquito canopy he cut in twain, and so ingeniously suspended tub and crockery just inside the two windows that the wariest intruder must certainly set in motion a clamorous little avalanche. Then, having tucked his revolver under the pillow, he prudently commended his soul to his Maker and composed himself to slumber of a hair-trigger kind.

The night passed without alarm and Captain Michael O'Shea roused himself out soon after day-break to smoke three strong Manila cigars and organize himself as a strategy board, or one might have said that he was clearing for action. Convinced that the game he played was a genuinely dangerous one, he was in haste to get afloat where he belonged. To dodge the wiles of an ambushed foe was not what he liked. At this kind of warfare the Chinese mind was too nimble for him.

He decided that he would keep the appointment to meet Charley Tong Sin at the yamen of the governor of the native city. No mischance was likely to befall him in broad daylight, and, given the opportunity, he would seek a private interview with that official. This business despatched, he proposed to show the water-front of Shanghai how speedily a river steamer could be manned and taken to sea.

Having eaten breakfast early and with good appetite, Captain O'Shea went out to find a 'rickshaw. Only one of them happened to be standing in front of the hotel and he had little trouble in making the swarthy, sturdy fellow in the shafts understand where he wished to go. The coolie set off at a racing trot, whisking the vehicle along with amazing ease. The passenger had not outgrown the idea that it was rather absurd and unfair for an able-bodied person to be pulled along in this fashion by another man no stronger than himself. Therefore, he nodded approval when the coolie slackened his gait and yelled at another stalwart Chinese squatted on the curbstone who picked himself up and ran behind the 'rickshaw as "push-man," making a double team of it.

Moved by two-man power, the light vehicle made a speedy passage through the British settlement and turned into the French quarter to reach the nearest gate-way of the native city wall. Soon the order and cleanliness and modernity of European territory and dominion were left behind and the 'rickshaw had spun into the swarming, filthy streets of the immortal China.

"The River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells can be no worse than this," said O'Shea to himself, "and for the love of heaven was there ever such a mess of people jumbled together?"

No more than eight or ten feet wide, the alleys were crowded with pedlars and street-merchants selling cakes, fish, pork, vegetables, porcelain, furs, embroideries, pictures, bamboo pipes, their wares

displayed on little wooden stands or spread upon the rutted flag-stones.

Jostling among them were laden mules, top-heavy wheelbarrows, bawling coolies sweating beneath the burden of the shoulder-yokes, hordes of idlers, screaming children, until it was to wonder why traffic was not wholly blockaded. Into this ruck of humanity, this immense confusion and noise, the two 'rickshaw men hurled their vehicle like a projectile. They shouted incessantly, threatening and reviling, nor tried to pick a way through the press. These who got in their path were knocked head over heels. Pedlers' barrows were upset helter-skelter. The onward course of Captain O'Shea was as destructive as a typhoon.

He yelled at his headlong chargers to slow down. They were likely to cause a riot. Already a mob was buzzing angrily in their wake and several missiles were hurled at the 'rickshaw. Captain O'Shea had the sensations of a man who was being run away with. This brace of pig-tailed fiends had bolted hell-for-leather. He was of a mind to jump out and let them go their own gait, but this enlarged baby-carriage of a 'rickshaw was awkward to disembark from while under way, and he was reluctant to risk landing upon his head. If he menaced them with a revolver the mob would be apt to join forces with them against the foreigner. Still, this might be the peculiar fashion of conveying a gentleman to the governor's yamen, and perhaps he had better sit tight and hold hard until the ship struck a rock.

Presently, however, he observed that several big swarthy men in blue cotton blouses were running alongside the coolie in the shafts and holding shouted converse with him. They appeared to be friends of his, and Captain O'Shea did not like their looks. They were hardier, more truculent of visage, than the pasty-faced Shanghai coolie class. The tough has the same ear-marks the world over, and these fellows were ruffians whom one would not care to meet in the dark.

A few minutes after these had joined company the 'rickshaw turned abruptly from one of the crowded streets and moved with undiminished speed into a wider but much less frequented thoroughfare lined with stables, straw-littered court-yards whose buildings were in ruinous decay, and hovels used as slaughter-houses where mangy dogs prowled in search of offal. The 'rickshaw tilted and veered sharply in the direction of one of these disreputable court-yards, and Captain Michael O'Shea, quite certain that he was not headed toward the governor's yamen, acted decisively and on the spur of the moment.

Things were going all wrong and very probably he would alight from the frying-pan into the fire, but this was nothing less than an abduction. The coolie in the shafts had coiled his queue under his cap, possibly to guard against the very manœuvre that O'Shea executed. But the wind and the rapid motion had loosed the end of the thick black braid and it bobbed between his shoulders and whipped free as he ran.

Bending forward, O'Shea clutched the queue in a tremendous grip and laid back as if he were hauling on a main-sheet. The rascal's head was fetched up with a dislocating jerk, his feet pawed the air for an instant, and his hands lost their hold of the shafts. Then, as he came down and tried vainly to get a footing, the careering 'rickshaw rammed him from behind and sent him sprawling on his face. Shot out from his seat went Captain O'Shea, his feet in front of him, a revolver in his fist, ready to bound up from the pavement and open the engagement on the instant.

The "push-man" had been violently poked under the chin by the back of the suddenly halted 'rickshaw, and he lay groaning and doubled up several feet away. The ruffianly escort, taken by surprise, ran a little distance before they could wheel and return to the scene. Captain O'Shea had a moment in which to get his bearings and take stock of the situation. Darting for the nearest wall, he braced his back against it and stood waiting. The big swarthy rascals in the blue blouses fiercely jabbered together, gazed up and down the almost deserted street, and with no more delay drew knives from their baggy breeches and charged with heads down.

O'Shea threw up his revolver for a snap-shot at the foremost of them. The hammer clicked. There was no report. He pulled the trigger again with the same result. For the third time the hammer fell with the same futile, sickening click. This was his finish. The thing was absurd, incredible. Raging,

he grasped the weapon by the barrel and ran forward to swing the butt against the nearest shaven head. A long knife ripped at him and slashed his sleeve. He cracked the man's head, but the others were at him like wolves. He dodged and tried to take to his heels, but the two 'rickshaw men blocked his path.

One of the assassins had worked around behind him and was trying to trip and get him down so that they could cut him to ribbons at their leisure. The knives hemmed him in. He slipped and fell upon one knee. The ruffians laughed.

Then, lo and behold! they were scampering frantically away, yelling in fear, scrambling over walls like monkeys, diving into the stables and court-yards, flying for the lower end of the street. In a twinkling Captain O'Shea was alone, magically snatched from death. White and shaking, he stood and gazed at a near-by corner of the crooked thoroughfare. Flinging past it came a squad of British bluejackets in white clothes, and the sun winked brightly on the polished metal of their rifles and cutlasses. Beside the lieutenant, in front of them, strode a tall, slim-waisted man in khaki uniform whom O'Shea recognized as Inspector Burke. O'Shea's assailants had been warned in time to scurry to cover before the British party had more than a flying glimpse of them. At a quick order shouted by the lieutenant, the sailors scattered into the yards and squalid buildings, but the fugitives had escaped by a dozen dark and devious exits to vanish in the labyrinths of the teeming, mys-

terious native city. Inspector Burke was pounding O'Shea on the back and exclaiming vigorously:

"My word, old chap! What sort of a bally row is this? The beggars nearly did for you. Lucky we happened along, wasn't it?"

"'Tis all of that," earnestly replied the shipmaster. "And who are ye, anyhow? Is this a fairy story or a play right out of the theatre? You came on the stage about one second before the curtain rung down."

"Leftenant Kempton-Shaw—ah, here he is—allow me to present him, Captain O'Shea—as I was about to say, he came ashore from the *Warspite* gunboat this mornin' with a batch of Chinese pirates, the real thing, don't you know. He took them out of a junk after a rather nice little shindy last week. He marched them to the Chinese prison just now, it's in this quarter of the native city, and their heads will be cut off to-morrow. I'm awfully pleased that we were taking this short cut home. In close quarters, weren't you?"

"I have never found them a closer fit," said O'Shea. "I was on me way for a chat with the governor, and a gang of bad citizens tried to wipe me out. I will walk along with you if ye don't mind. There is enough Irish in me to waste no great love on the British flag, but I will say, Lieutenant Kempton-Shaw, that I never laid eyes on a finer, handsomer lot of men than these lads of yours from the *Warspite*."

"Thanks, and I fancy you mean it," smiled the naval officer. "This is extraordinary, by Jove.

Foreigners are fairly safe in the native city, as a rule, are they not, Burke? What do you make of it?"

"I shall have to hear Captain O'Shea's report."

"I have no long-winded report to offer," incisively declared the shipmaster. "I have me suspicions, and you can guess what they are, Inspector Burke. 'Tis the same business that we talked about in your office. But I wish nothing to do with any police investigations. You will report this row of mine to the native government, I have no doubt, and I hope ye will try to collect an indemnity for me distressed emotions, but I have no time to dilly-dally about in Shanghai. I will go to sea. Will you help me find the men?"

"From the tone of your voice I infer that your business is not precisely pacific, my dear sir," put in Lieutenant Kempton-Shaw. "Do you mind letting the *Warspites* in on this cruise of yours?"

"Thank you, but I have set out to handle it as an affair of me own. I may have bit off more than I can chew, but I will try to see it through."

"Meet me at my office at noon and I'll have some men for you to look over," said Inspector Burke. "I will pick up a crew for you if I have to make a general jail-delivery."

As they trudged along Captain O'Shea became silent and abstracted. He was not in a mood for conversation. Conjecture pointed one way. He had been a gullible fool who deserved to have a knife stuck in his ribs. It had been as easy to trap him as though he were a lubber on his first voyage out from

home. It had been with design that only one 'rickshaw stood in front of the hotel that morning when he was ready to go to the native city. And the pair of coolies were hired cutthroats who had steered him into the disgusting street among the slaughterhouses in order that he might be done away with, leaving never a trace of his fate behind him.

Reasoning back from this link to the next preceding, his room had been entered and ransacked while he was safely out of the way in a carriage on the Bubbling Well Road. Some time had been required to make that careful examination and fit keys to his hand-bag and trunk. Also, he had just now investigated his revolver and discovered that the firing-pin of the hammer had been filed, not enough for the eye to notice it, but sufficiently to cause the impact to fail to explode the primer of the cartridge.

The affable, gilded young gentleman who had invited him to drive on the Bubbling Well Road was the same kind acquaintance who had suggested that he take a 'rickshaw and visit the native city in the morning. The finger of coincidence pointed in the direction of that smartest of compradores, Charley Tong Sin.

"That kind of coincidence is unhealthier than the cholera," said O'Shea to himself. "Maybe this sport with the college education and the taste for gin cocktails is a good friend of mine, but I will give him no chance to prove it again. I have been on the jump ever since I met him. If he is not crooked he is a hoodoo. And 'tis not impossible, after all,

that he is mixed up with this gang of murderers that I am running after. The heart of him is Chinese."

He would keep these suspicions to himself. They lacked tangible proof, and he held to the view that the business was entirely his own. He had plunged into this befogged maze of circumstances like a boy on a holiday, and it was for him to extricate himself like a man. With the warmest expressions of gratitude he parted from Inspector Burke and the naval lieutenant, and hastened in the direction of the water-front.

Less than an hour later he was inspecting a light-draught steamer called the *Whang Ho* owned by the China Navigation Company. She was old, sadly in need of repairs, and about as sea-worthy for rough weather as a packing-box. But O'Shea felt confident that she could be nursed along to serve his purpose, and the larger, better vessels available for charter at short notice were not so handy for exploring muddy rivers and strange corners. Having put to sea at one time and another in craft which were held together only by their paint, Captain O'Shea asked no more of the *Whang Ho* than that her engines should turn over. He dared not examine the machinery too closely lest he might lose confidence in his steamer, but the owners' agent assured him that she was fit for service and he took his word for it. "Start her fires going at once," said O'Shea, "and if enough pressure shows on the gauges to turn her wheel as she lies at her moorings, I will sign the

charter-party and insurance papers and slap down the two thousand dollars for a month's use of the venerable relic."

"That is fair enough," replied the agent. "And it is as good as done. You can go ahead with getting your supplies, Captain O'Shea. I take it that you want to do a bit of exploration work for one of the American syndicates? We have done quite a lot of business with your people and their concessions."

"It may be something like that," briefly returned O'Shea. "And now will you be kind enough to tell me where to order a hundred and fifty tons of steam coal to be put in the bunkers this very day?"

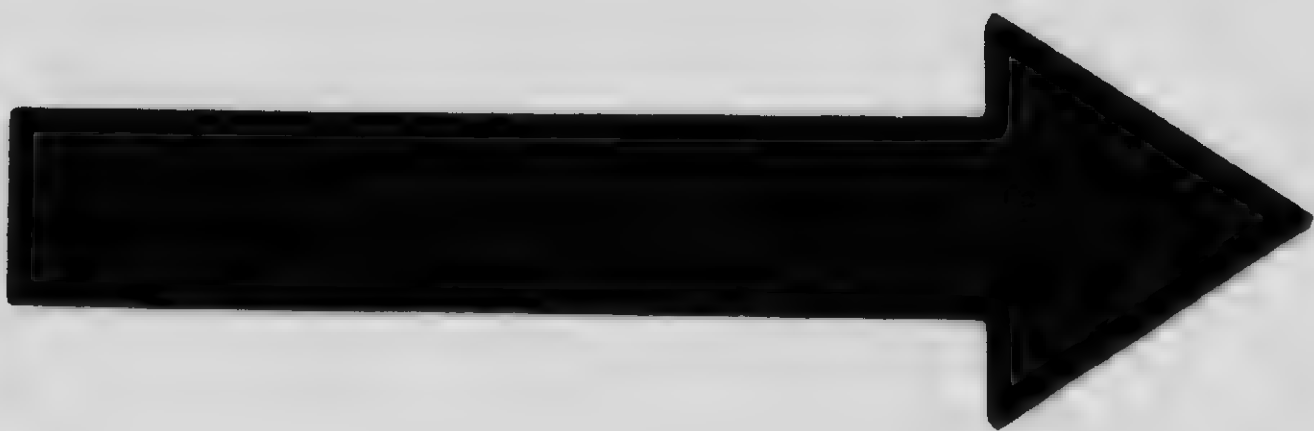
"Our company will be pleased to let you have it, and I can guarantee prompt delivery from lighters alongside the steamer. Or I presume that Jordan, Margetson will do the same for you."

"I think I will not deal with Jordan, Margetson," and O'Shea's voice was smooth and pleasant. "The comprador is a very able young man."

"Charley Tong Sin? Well, rather. A smart chap, that."

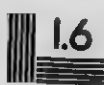
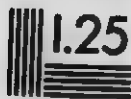
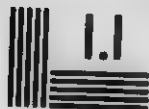
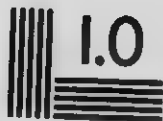
"Yes, very. I wish I could keep my razor as sharp."

Captain O'Shea next visited a ship-chandler's and submitted his list of stores, making it a condition of payment that the stuff should be in the steamer before sunset. The elderly German who served him had the tact and discretion bred of long experience with the seafarers of the unexpected Orient. It was his business to sell them whatever they might want,



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to take his profit and ask no questions. Yes, he could find thirty service rifles and revolvers, also cutlasses of the best steel. They were of patterns discarded by a certain European government, but excellent weapons. He would be glad to sell the captain one, five, or ten thousand of them. The captain was not a man to wag a foolish tongue; one could see it at a glance.

"You and I might do business some day," quoth O'Shea, "but I am too busy to start a revolution at present."

He sent a note to Paddy Blake asking him to find a dozen Chinese firemen and sailors and a river pilot, and to muster them ready for signing articles in the afternoon. He believed the old Irishman to be a ripened scoundrel at his own trade, but suspected him of no complicity in the manoeuvres of Charley Tong Sin. The comprador had merely used Paddy Blake as a means of making the acquaintance of Captain O'Shea.

Five minutes after noon the shipmaster (he had taken a decided dislike to riding in 'rickshaws) trudged into the headquarters building of Inspector Burke.

"I have a choice collection for you to look over," said the latter. "They are waiting in another room, and I should call them a worried lot. I sent my men out to pick them up, do you see, and they have not been told the reason why."

"I cannot afford to be particular, Inspector Burke. Let me at them and I will see whether I am safer

ashore among the Chinese or at sea with your exhibit of beach-combers."

"Oh, they are not as bad as that," the inspector assured him. "I should scarcely call them desperate characters. However, while I wish you the best of luck, old chap, I shall shed never a tear if you lose your shipmates somewhere beyond Shanghai. Let us call them soldiers of misfortune, if you like."

He led the way into the large drill-room, where a score or more of men stood in uneasy attitudes and appeared not at all comfortable in this environment. O'Shea let his glance rove in swift, appraising scrutiny and smiled to himself as he recognized one familiar type after another. He had recruited such men as these for unostentatious ventures in the waters of the Spanish Main. Here was the red-faced, burly shipmaster ready with a glib speech and fluent curses to explain how he happened to be without his papers; the shambling ne'er-do-well with the slack mouth and the weak chin who had fled from a scrape at home to lose himself in foreign ports; the tanned adventurer, brave and resourceful, who was fit for nothing else than the life of a rover; the battered old seaman, worn out by the hardships of the forecastle, who had been cast adrift from the hospital; the cashiered army officer with the hall-mark of his caste blurred but still visible; the sharp-featured young man with the furtive eye who lived by his wits and found it very hard living indeed; the bleary tropical tramp who would sell his soul for a drink of brandy.

These and the rest of them were seedy in various

ways. They conveyed a sense of failure, of having lost their grip. Their clothes did not signify this so much as what life had written in their faces. Several, in fact, were dressed in clean white duck and linen. They were fighting hard to preserve the guise of self-respect. And yet every man of them had marched to police headquarters at a word from Inspector Burke with the sick fear in his heart that his past had overtaken him, or that he was to be deported for the good of the community that he was to be locked up as a vagrant.

Inspector Burke felt pity for them. It was heartless to keep the poor devils in this painful suspense. With a curt nod he addressed them in a group, for they had unwittingly drifted together as if finding some small comfort in solidarity.

"This is not police business," said he. "I sent for you to oblige my friend Captain O'Shea. He will explain what he wants, and I advise you to play square with him and I'm quite sure he will make it worth while."

At this the company brightened and looked immensely relieved. The hang-dog manner fled. Shoulders were braced, heads held erect. They were like different men. O'Shea had a less pessimistic opinion of them. He had already concluded to show no finicky taste by picking and choosing. He would take them in a lump, good, bad, and indifferent. Those who were really competent would soon disclose it on shipboard and they could help him hammer the others into shape.

"My speech to you will be short and sweet," said he. "I need men for a voyage coastwise and me steamer will be ready to sail to-night. You will live well and I expect ye to obey orders. 'Tis not sailors' work or I should not take on your kind. The fewer questions ye ask the more popular ye will be with me. The pay will be at the rate of five dollars a day gold, but I will give no advances. I want ye to come aboard sober. If you handle yourselves like men I will pay ye a bonus at the end of the voyage. Those that want to go will give me their names."

Not a man hung back or asked a question. They whispered softly among themselves, as if afraid to make a slip that might break the spell. Captain O'Shea had one thing more to say and they listened with the most devout attention.

"I took note of the small Hotel London down by the water-side. 'Tis a clean, decent place and I have had a word with the landlord. I will give every man me card. If you show it to him he will be pleased to entertain ye at dinner at once, and he will hand ye out cigars and three drinks apiece, no more. And I will meet you there for supper at six o'clock to-night."

"Excellent strategy," murmured Inspector Burke.

"By the way," cried O'Shea to his pleased followers, "I overlooked something. I need a chief engineer. Can any one of you qualify?"

It appeared that none of them was sufficiently acquainted with the internal works of a steamer to pass

as an expert, although a young man of a very Cockney accent thought he might do as an assistant.

Inspector Burke made haste to remark:

"I say, let me give you the very man for the job. Kittridge is his name. It's rather awkward, for he is in clink at present, the British jail. But his time expires to-morrow—he was given thirty days—and I dare say the magistrate will be willing to sign release papers if I explain the situation."

"I am not asking me men for references," observed O'Shea, "but, as a matter of mild curiosity, what did ye put this Kittridge away for?"

"He tried to whip my entire Sikh police force, and he made a jolly good beginning. Then his ship sailed away and left him in quod. He was engineer in a Cardiff tramp. A very good man, I understand."

"He sounds like it. His references are most satisfactory, especially what he did to your turbanned cops," O'Shea cordially affirmed. "Send this Kittridge to the Hotel London, if ye please, and give him this card of mine, and tell him to wait for me there."

Through the afternoon Captain Michael O'Shea, now master of the aged river steamer *Whang Ho*, was the busiest and most energetic of men. A hundred and one things presented themselves as necessary to be done. When at length he hurried into the Hotel London shortly before the supper-hour his men were waiting, hopeful, expectant, cheerful, smoking his cigars and with the three drinks apiece

tucked under their belts. Among them was a lanky, solemn person with a pair of gray side-whiskers and a leathery complexion crisscrossed by a net-work of fine wrinkles. His whole appearance was eminently decorous and respectable and he seemed to have strayed into the wrong company. It was not far-fetched to conjecture that he might be a missionary from some station in the Chinese hinterland who had kindly concerned himself with the souls of this congregation of black sheep.

Captain O'Shea bowed to him with a puzzled, respectful air, at which the pious stranger remarked:

"Inspector Burke told me to report here and be damn quick about it. I am Kittridge, and I hear you are wanting an engineer."

"Excuse me, Mr. Kittridge. I came near mistakin' you for a sky-pilot. And so your favorite pastime is beating up Sikh policemen! I have a job for ye at double the wages you got in your tramp steamer, whatever they were. Are you willing?"

"I would sign on with the devil himself to get clear of this blankety-blank pig-hole of a blistering Shanghai," promptly exclaimed Mr. Kittridge.

"Where's your ship? Shall I go aboard at once?"

"Please take a look at the engine-room and report to me here. She is the *Whang Ho*, tied up at the China Navigation Company's wharf. Don't be too critical, but if there's work that is absolutely necessary I will send ye machinists to work all night."

"I know the condemned little hooker by sight," bitterly quoth Mr. Kittridge with a tug at his star-

board whisker. "Very well, sir. I will take a squint at her and make out my list of engine-room stores. Can you get them to-night?"

"The ship-chandler is waiting to hear from me, and I have sent word to the machine-shop," briefly answered O'Shea.

Paddy Blake had very promptly raked up the required number of Chinese hands and was ready to deliver them on board whenever required. To the Hotel London he came, towing by the arm a most extraordinarily bent and shrivelled anatomy with a wisp of a white queue, whom he turned over to Captain O'Shea with the explanation:

"Here is a river and coastwise pilot for ye that is as wise as Confucius. And by the same token, I have no doubt that he was once pilot aboard the junk of that grand old philosopher himself. Or maybe he was shipmates with Noah."

The ancient mariner croaked a phrase or two in a grating, rusty voice, and O'Shea dubiously observed:

"If he talks no English at all how will I tell him where I want to go?"

"I have sent ye a Chinese bos'n that can sling th' pidgin," said Paddy Blake. "Dearly would I love to know where ye are bound and what bobbery ye are up to, Captain Mike O'Shea, but a man in my business has learned to ask no more silly questions than he can help."

"Keep that magnum on ice till I come back to Shanghai and I will spin ye the yarn in the little back room of yours, Paddy."

"May ye come back right side up," warmly exclaimed the old man. "By th' look of the friends ye have mustered to go wid you, I wud say that ye are bound out on what th' Shanghai diplomats call a policy of binivolint assimilation."

The report of the aggrieved Mr. Kittridge was to the effect that while the engines of the *Whang Ho* would probably take her to sea without breaking down, a night's work on the condenser, not to mention a leaky cylinder, would considerably improve her health. Captain O'Shea told him to drive ahead with these repairs; nor was the delay worth fretting about. Things had gone amazingly well thus far and the *Whang Ho* would be ready to sail in the morning. He had no desire to spend another night ashore, and he would take his company on board at once, assign them to quarters, and make a tentative organization for sea duty.

The *Whang Ho* had been fitted for passenger service on the Yang-tse, and there were state-rooms on the upper deck to hold twice the number of O'Shea's recruits. In the Chinese draft sent aboard by Paddy Blake were a cook and a steward trained to their business, and they put things to rights in their quiet, deft way. The mood of Captain O'Shea became normally cheerful and confident. He had a deck under his feet, his word was law, and it was good to hear the lap of salt water and the swirl of the tide against a vessel's side.

He was awake and about until midnight. The work in the engine-room was progressing rapidly un-

der the vehement direction of Mr. Kittridge. Feeling the need of sleep, for the preceding night had been a broken one, Captain O'Shea set a watch in charge of the burly shipmaster of his company whom he appointed first mate and went to his bunk in the cabin just abaft the wheel-house. At three o'clock Mr. Kittridge, very hot and grimy, rapped on the door and gruffly announced that the machinists had gone ashore and he proposed to turn in and sleep until sailing-time.

At six o'clock Captain O'Shea went on deck in his pajamas to order the steward to fetch him a cup of coffee. He saw no reason why the steamer should not get under way at once. The Chinese steward came not at his call and he betook himself to the galley. A fire was burning in the range, rice and potatoes were cooking in the pots, bacon sliced on the table ready for frying, but there was no cook. O'Shea looked puzzled and started for the forecastle. On the way he met his first mate whose demeanor was distressed and excited.

"I was about to call you, sir," he exclaimed, his red face working with emotion. "You will think I've made a hash of my first night on duty, but this insane business happened like a shot out of a gun, sir. Not ten minutes ago the Chinamen, every last one of 'em, came boiling on deck and went over the side to the wharf like so many rats. And they never did stop running. They were scared; it was a panic; but they didn't stop to jabber. They just flew, and most of 'em left their dunnage behind."

"The devil you say," muttered O'Shea, and he rubbed his head in slightly bewildered fashion. "That must have been just before I stepped on deck, Mr. Parkinson. And ye have no idea at all what it was about?"

"Not the slightest, sir. I hope you don't blame me. I'd have sailed into the thick of them with my fists, but it was like chasing so many greased pigs. They vanished before you could more than wink."

"What about the fires?" snapped the captain. "Have you been below?"

"Yes, sir. The first thing I did was to find Mr. Kittridge. He is in the engine-room, and he told me to send down half a dozen of our white men to keep up steam."

"Good enough! Now sing out for a volunteer cook, and I will investigate this comical performance. Did anybody get aboard to talk to these Chinamen?"

"Not a soul, sir. I'm sure of it. I had a reliable man at the gangway, and another on the wharf."

"I believe you. While I look around a bit, get the ship ready to go to sea, Mr. Parkinson. 'Tis not in me mind to be hung up in port very long."

A sailing junk was attempting to reach with the morning breeze across the wide stretch of river. Hauling close to the wharf at which the *Whang Ho* was moored, the junk attempted to come about, but missed stays in lubberly fashion and hung in the wind as she slowly drifted past the steamer's stern. The Chinese who clung to the long tiller, and the

others who stood upon the poop or hauled on the cordage, were gazing with signs of excitement at the *Whang Ho*. Several of them gesticulated, and their fingers were aimed at the rounded, overhanging stern of Captain O'Shea's vessel. He caught sight of those antics and walked aft.

There was no good reason why the crew of the passing junk should make such a fuss over this commonplace river steamer. Their singular interest in her might be worth trying to fathom. Without delaying to seek the gangway, he threw his leg around a tautened hawser and slid down to the wharf. Running out to the end of it, he commanded a clear view of the stern of the *Whang Ho*. Upon the white woodwork, just above the counter, was painted in broad strokes of bright vermilion the sprawling Chinese character which had been gashed in the back of the sailor named Jim Eldridge.

Captain O'Shea hastily returned on board and climbed over the after rail, belaying a loose end of heaving-line and resting his foot in the loop so that he was able to let himself down until he could touch the uppermost smear of vermilion paint. It rubbed off on his hand, fresh and wet, and must have been applied during the night. His Chinese crew had discovered it there. Perhaps some one had sung out the information from a passing junk or sampan. At any rate, this was what had made them quit the steamer. A charge of dynamite could have made their exodus no more expeditious. The word had flown from mouth to mouth, and they fled from the

ship as from the plague. Even the incredibly aged pilot had hobbled away with the rest of them, fear restoring an agility long since departed.

"The hoodoo again!" reflectively exclaimed O'Shea. "I thought I had got clear of it. 'Tis not so much to frighten me this time as to delay the voyage. Somebody is anxious to send word up the coast ahead of me to let some one else know I am coming. That is a guess, and 'tis as good as the next one."

He would find Paddy Blake at once and discuss the matter with him. Perhaps he could ship another crew and leave port before the news had time to spread among the Chinese seafarers. Telling Mr. Parkinson to see to it that the vermilion paint was instantly removed, he set out on foot along the water-front. At this early hour, there was no stir of business among the foreign shipping-houses. Passing a substantial brick building, Captain O'Shea's eye was held for an instant by the brass sign on one of the doors, "Jordan, Margetson & Co." He happened to be thinking quite assiduously just then of the courteous comprador, Charley Tong Sin. He halted and stared hard at the door in front of him which was ajar.

It was too early for any of the clerks to be about. With an impulse which had no definite purpose behind it, Captain O'Shea pushed open the door and quietly stepped into the hallway and thence into the main office with its row of desks. The room was empty, and he moved in the direction of the smaller,

detached offices in the rear, still treading softly. Yes, the shrewd and zealous comprador, so faithful to his employers' interests, was already at work. When the visitor caught sight of him he was bending over a table littered with papers, intent on arranging and filing them. Possibly his ears were as quick as his wits and he had heard Captain O'Shea before seeing him. Unruffled and smiling, with an air of delighted surprise, the comprador exclaimed, advancing with hand outstretched:

"How glad I am to see you again! The top of the morning! Were you looking to find me? Ah, I am the early bird, you bet."

"I expected to sail by now, but there has been a bit of trouble with me native crew," replied the shipmaster, wary as a hawk. "I saw your place was open and I dropped in on the chance of bidding ye farewell. You mentioned the other night that you sometimes came down early."

"That is the deuce of my business, Captain," easily returned Charley Tong Sin. "Trouble with your crew? Can I help you? Do you need men? I am sorry you didn't come to me in the first place."

"I wish I had. 'Twas old Paddy Blake I first turned to as one Irishman to another. And maybe I was wrong in not asking your advice about the steamer."

If this were a fencing-match, then O'Shea had scored the first point. His bold, ingenuous features expressed not the slightest change of emotion, but in an instant he had discovered that which clinched

and drove home his suspicions of Charley Tong Sin. The comprador put a fresh cigarette to his lips and held a lighted match between his fingers, unaware that the flare conveyed a fleeting translucence. Underneath the beautifully polished nails of his thumb and forefinger there showed a line of vermillion which the most careful scrubbing had failed to eradicate. It was the color of the paint which had been smeared on the stern of the *Whang Ho* in the form of a sprawling Chinese character.

The luck of Captain Michael O'Shea so ordered it that he should observe this phenomenon before the flare of the match died out. Thereupon he lied swiftly and plausibly, the purpose hot in his heart to find a pretext that should coax the comprador to accompany him on board the *Whang Ho*. To a sympathetic query Captain O'Shea smoothly made answer:

"I am the kind of a man that will own up to his own mistakes. I thought I could go it alone when I ought to have been glad and thankful for the help of a man like yourself. Between us, I am not anxious to go to sea in this old tub that I have chartered from the China Navigation Company. And now that I am delayed for lack of a crew, maybe you can show me a way to slip out of the bargain. My chief engineer finds the vessel is not at all what she was represented to be. I took her subject to certain conditions and she cannot make good."

"I told you you would be stung in Shanghai without me," laughed Charley Tong Sin in the

greatest good-humor. "Better chuck up the *Whang Ho* and let me find you a steamer."

"That I will do, and gladly," affirmed O'Shea. "Have ye time to step aboard with me now and I will show you how I have been buncoed. Then ye can advise me how to break the charter. I have a good case."

"Of course I will," cried the comprador. "Pooh, we will bluff the China Navigation Company out of its boots. I will make them look like thirty cents."

"You are the smartest comprador between Tientsin and Singapore, according to Paddy Blake, and I have no doubt of it," sweetly murmured Captain O'Shea.

"That's what everybody says," affably rejoined Charley Tong Sin as they walked into the street. "What is the trouble with your crew?"

"You can search me. I cannot find out for the life of me. They up and jumped ship without warning."

"I will get more men for you. Leave it to me. You have come to the right place this time, Captain O'Shea."

Chatting amiably, the twain came to the wharf and climbed the gangway of the *Whang Ho*. That anxious first mate, Mr. Parkinson, pitifully afraid lest he lose his billet and be turned adrift because he had failed to prevent the desertion of the crew, brightened perceptibly at sight of Charley Tong Sin and concluded that this influential young man had been persuaded to mend the troubles.

"Come to my room, if ye please," said Captain O'Shea to the smiling comprador, "and I will summon my chief engineer. He will tell you that the steamer is not fit to make three knots an hour, and then we will go below."

The shipmaster beckoned Mr. Parkinson to follow. The trio were passing through the wide hall of the main cabin when Captain O'Shea halted. Swinging on his heel, he stood facing Charley Tong Sin, who started slightly, for the visage of Captain O'Shea was stern and lowering.

What followed was instantaneous. The shipmaster's fist shot out and collided with the jaw of the comprador, who measured his length on the floor and appeared to be wrapped in slumber. Only the toes of his neat patent-leather shoes oscillated gently. The expression of his face was singularly peaceful. The oblique eyelids were closed.

The aghast Mr. Parkinson sputtered in great dismay:

"My God, sir, what have you done? We'll all go to jail for this. This is Jordan, Margetson's right-hand man."

"I have given him a sleeping-powder," said O'Shea. "Take him by the heels while I carry the other end of him and we will lock him in a spare state-room. Put a guard over him. If he squeals, hit him again and keep him quiet."

The mate was about to renew his protests, but his voice died in his throat. Perceiving that he wavered miserably, Captain O'Shea spoke once more, and his accents were hard:

"You can make your choice, Mr. Parkinson. Ye sail with me and you play my game or you can go ashore to rot and starve on the beach, same as when I picked ye out of the gutter. I have given this dirty young Chinese blackguard a taste of what is coming to him. Will ye fall to or shall I kick you out of the ship?"

"I—I will take your orders, sir," stammered the other.

"Then help me get this steamer to sea. We will wait for no more Chinese sailors. Muster all hands on the upper deck."

They came piling up from the hold and the dining-room abaft the galley, where most of them had been at breakfast. The inanimate comprador was no longer visible.

"Will you sail with me at once or lose the chance of making the voyage?" demanded O'Shea. "Some of you will have to shovel coal and others wash dishes and do seamen's duty on deck. But I will pay ye extra for it, and we will take this old box of a steamer to where we want to go."

The response was hearty and unanimous. The adventurers could think of no worse fate than to be once more stranded in Shanghai. They were well fed, they had slept in clean beds again, and their employer was a man who could be trusted to deal with them fairly. With a spirited cheer they scattered to their various stations. The chief engineer spoke briefly, his gray whiskers standing out in the morning breeze:

"Nobody but a wild Irishman would have the

nerve to take this painted coffin to sea with a gang of misbegotten greenhorns to man her. I have steam enough to give her steerage-way whenever you're ready to cast off, Captain O'Shea."

"Then let go, fore and aft," roared the master.

"Are ye pilot enough to take her down the river, Mr. Parkinson?"

"I could do it with both eyes shut, but I'm not so familiar with the coast to the north'ard."

"I have a pilot for the part of the coast and the river we are bound for," grimly returned O'Shea.

"He is locked in a spare state-room just now. He will know that part of China very well, for 'tis me opinion that he has been there before."

V

OVER a mournful, muddy expanse of the China Sea wallowed a top-heavy river steamer whose engines raised protesting clamor like an assemblage of threshing-machines. The gods of the air and water were in a kindly mood or else she would have opened up and foundered ere now. In the spray-swept wheel-house stood Captain Michael O'Shea, swaying easily to the crazy roll and lurch of the *Whang Ho* and scanning the low dim coast with a pair of glasses. Clinging to the window ledge beside him was a young man of a Chinese countenance whose raiment, the handiwork of a fashionable British tailor, was sadly rumpled and soiled. The whole aspect of the young man was rumpled, in fact, not

to say excessively forlorn, and now and then he pressed his hand against a painful jaw. It was difficult to imagine that he had been an ornament of clubs, a pattern for the gilded youth, and the smartest comprador between Tientsin and Singapore.

The plight of Charley Tong Sin was made poignantly distressing by the fact that in the process of acquiring the vices of the Occident he had lost his grip on the essential virtues of the Orient. His native stoicism had been sapped and the fatalistic attitude of mind which meets death without so much as the flutter of an eyelid was eaten with dry-rot. In other words, the comprador was willing to pay any price to save his own skin, although his father before him would have suffered himself to be sliced to death by inches sooner than "lose face" in the presence of a foreigner.

Captain Michael O'Shea's method of extracting information from this kidnapped passenger had been brutally simple and direct. Charley Tong Sin was informed that he could make a clean breast of it or be thrown overboard. And the shipmaster, when he was thoroughly in earnest, had a way of conveying the impression that he meant what he said. He believed that he knew his man. The comprador was strongly reluctant to have his head lopped off by the sword of a native executioner, which was very likely to happen if this terrible O'Shea should turn him over to the Chinese authorities. Given the promise of immunity in exchange for a confession, he could flee to Japan or the Straits Settlements and

live handsomely in the society of other Chinese exiles with the funds that he had piled up during his brief and brilliant business career. Likewise there would be opportunities in shipping and commerce for a comprador of his uncommon ability.

"I would honestly enjoy killing you, Charley," said Captain O'Shea as they stood together in the wheel-house of the *Whang Ho*. "You are a smart lad, but ye got too gay with me, and you overplayed your game when ye slipped under the counter of this steamer in a sampan in the dark of the night and got busy with the red paint. That sort of silly jugglery was the Chinese of it, I suppose. Now, I have tried to make it plain that your life is not worth a pinch of snuff to any one of us. There is not a man in the ship that wants to lay eyes on Shanghai ever again. They will be only too glad to quit the country if they have the price in their pockets, and I will give them the price. So ye must not hold to the notion that we are afraid of getting in trouble on your account."

"I am worth more to you alive than if I am dead," sullenly muttered Charley Tong Sin. "Is it not so? You think I will be handy as a pilot, as an interpreter? I have been doing a deuce of a lot of thinking. I am no fool, Captain O'Shea. I know pretty well when I am licked. I made a botch of it in Shanghai. You went blundering about like a buffalo, and I thought it was a cinch to get you out of the way."

"'Twas the luck of the Irish that pulled me through," said O'Shea. "Now we understand each

other, Charley, me iad. I am staking all I have—me life and me money—to get to the bottom of this infernal secret society you have mixed yourself up with. 'Tis an instrument I am for the good of humanity. And if ye turn state's evidence to enable me to make a clean, thorough job of it, I think I am justified in giving you a chance to hot-foot it out of China."

"Let us call it a bargain, Captain O'Shea. As we used to say in New York, I am up against it good and plenty. To commit suicide, as many Chinese would do in a fix like this, is all tommy-rot. Charley Tong Sin could have no more gin cocktails—what?"

"You can begin the confession right away," exclaimed the shipmaster.

"One thing at a time," cheerfully replied the comprador. "I will take you to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells and the village of Wang-Li-Fu. Then you will find many very interesting things to ask me to talk about."

"And ye hope to give me the slip in the meantime," and Captain O'Shea showed no ill-will. "Very well, Charley. One thing at a time. Now take these glasses and have a look at the coast. By my reckoning, we are far enough to the north'ard to begin to haul inshore."

The *Whang Ho* was laboring abeam of a monotonous expanse of marshy islands and ragged shoals made by the silt of river floods. The shifting channels were poorly charted, for trade sought the inland water-ways. The fact that the *Tai Yan*

steamer, with McDougal and Jim Eldridge on board, had somehow found a passage leading from the sea convinced Captain O'Shea that he could do likewise with a considerably smaller vessel. Charley Tong Sin had admitted that he knew the way in, and he was no more anxious to be drowned than the rest of the company.

"With good luck we can scrape over the sand-bars on the afternoon tide," said the comprador, "and anchor in deep water for the night. I cannot show you where to go in the dark. There are no lights."

The *Whang Ho* edged steadily nearer the coast. Her crew gazed ahead at the frothing breakers that tumbled over the far-extended shoals, and appeared unhappy. By a miracle their steamer was still under them after struggling through rough winds and high seas, and now they were to be wrecked, so all signs indicated, in a God-forsaken region of sand and swamp and mud. However, there was no whimpering. Captain O'Shea, their overlord, had a trick of knocking a man down and then listening to his complaints. And he was as ready with a word of commendation as he was with his disciplinary fists.

"Mr. Kittridge, if we hit bottom, put it to her and jam her over," he remarked to the chief engineer. "A chum of mine by the name of Johnny Kent that sailed with me and held your berth used to clamp his safety-valves when he had urgent need of steam. Did ye ever try it?"

"God forbid!" fervently ejaculated Mr. Kittridge;

"but in this crazy tub a man will do anything. If you find yourself flyin' to glory with a section of a boiler pokin' in the small of your back, don't lay it against me, sir."

"I like the way ye talk, Mr. Kittridge. Stand by your engines, if ye please, for we will be in the white water before long."

The *Whang Ho* sheered to one side and shouldered past the outermost shoals. O'Shea took the wheel, and Charley Tong Sin, cool and quick-witted, told him how to follow the turbid, twisting channel that wound its course between the sea and the wide mouth of the estuary. More than once the steamer scraped the oozy bottom, hung and shivered while the breakers pounded her, and then stubbornly forged ahead, timbers groaning, boilers hissing, propeller kicking up clouds of mud astern. It was evident that the channel had shoaled in places since any other steamer had made the passage, and it was not at all certain that the *Whang Ho* could stand the strain of forcing her way to sea again.

"I have not been here since two years ago," said the comprador. "It is worse than I expected, you bet! Ai oh, a man that sails with you dies a dozen deaths, Captain O'Shea."

"I find it more comfortable than living in the best hotel in Shanghai," very pointedly returned the shipmaster as he climbed the spokes of the big wooden wheel with hands and feet and wrenched the *Whang Ho* clear of a hungry sand-spit. By now she was fairly in the midst of the marshy islands that ex-

tended from the watery main-land. The violence of the surf was broken and the tide moved in broad, sluggish currents. Mr. Parkinson, who was swinging the sounding lead, shouted that the channel had deepened to five fathoms. The steamer had survived the passage.

Two miles farther inland she let go anchor in a wide lagoon. The afternoon had waned. A cloudy twilight was closing down. On every hand stretched a flat, unbroken region of swamp and creeks and rivers. No villages were visible nor groves of trees against the sky-line to mark the situation of a temple. A few small fishing-boats with ragged sails fled at sight of the foreign steamer. The comprador waved his hand to starboard and exclaimed:

"Yonder it is, the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells, as you call it in English. Wait till the tide goes down, and you will find out pretty quick why the Chinese give it that funny name."

"'Tis a filthy-looking country," quoth Captain O'Shea. "It looks like one great big sewer, with the yellow water and the sludge and the slime on the banks."

"It was all very well drained one time, long ago," explained Charley Tong Sin. "Then there were many people and towns. The Tai Pings destroyed the canals and played the dickens with everything. And nothing has been repaired, so the people don't live here any more."

"And where is this place called Wang-Li-Fu?" demanded O'Shea.

"Six miles up that stinking river. You think you will see the Painted Joss to-morrow, Captain?"

"The Stinking River and the Painted Joss! You are loosening up, Charley. I am near the end of me journey when you say things like that. I have heard of them before."

"The other foreign men—only two—have seen the Painted Joss, and it was unfortunate for them." The comprador said this softly and with an evil grin. He had overstepped the mark. Captain O'Shea gripped him by the neck and shook him savagely as he thundered in his ear:

"Any more of that, and I will forget the bargain we made. One of those men was a friend of mine, and by rights I ought to drill ye with a bullet as a favor to him."

Between chattering teeth Charley Tong Sin, suddenly abject, begged for his life. Presently he moved restlessly from one deck to another, but always a man followed and kept watch of him, as Captain O'Shea had ordered. The ship's company, most of them off duty and wearied with the stress and hardships of the voyage, gathered under an awning stretched between the deck-houses and talked in low tones. This melancholy, empty landscape had a quality curiously depressing. With the falling tide the swamps and the muddy banks were laid bare and the air became foul and heavy with the smell of decayed vegetation, of ooze, of dead fish. The ebb and flow of salt-water failed to cleanse and sweeten these sluggish streams and stagnant lagoons and abandoned canals.

The men who had followed Captain O'Shea to this place were no longer so many vagabonds and failures struggling for survival. They had been welded together, in a way. They were an organization with something like *esprit de corps* and could be depended on to act as a unit. Such a feeling as this brings to life dead self-respect and shattered confidence. They knew not at all what the morrow might bring forth, but every one of them was anxious to play the man, to stand the test, to redeem himself in his own sight, to justify Captain O'Shea's faith in him.

It was not a night to invite sleep. The adventurers felt the immense loneliness of this loathsome anchorage. It was unlike the populous China which they had hitherto known. One might believe, with the natives, that ghosts and demons had power to curse and blast a region in which some violation of the *fung-shui*, or sacred rites of wind and water, had angered the supernatural influences. The breeze died to a dead calm. The lifeless air reeked with the stench from the mouth of the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells.

It was drawing toward midnight when Mr. Kitt-ridge came on deck and said to Captain O'Shea, who was sitting with a group of his men:

"I shall have to start the pumps, sir. The vessel is leakin' much worse than when I first reported it."

"Um-m, I was hoping we could lay her on a beach after we have finished our business up the river and calk her plates," replied the master of the *Whang*

Ho. "Is she making water faster than you can handle it, Mr. Kittridge?"

"She acts to me as if a plate dropped clean out of her a few minutes ago, sir. The pumps may help, but I have a notion that the whole rotten, blankety river is runnin' into her."

Captain O'Shea jumped below and was promptly convinced that the gloomy diagnosis of the chief engineer had a large basis of fact. The water was fairly rushing into the holds and gurgling over the ballast. Likely enough, the battering passage in from sea had sheared and wrenched away enough rusty rivets to weaken the junction of two or more plates, and they had been unable any longer to withstand the pressure. It really made no difference whether or not this theory was the correct one. The fact was that the venerable *Whang Ho* had suddenly decided to lay her bones in the mud with six fathoms of water above her keel. Mr. Kittridge pensively caressed his gray whiskers and remarked with a sigh:

"I mentioned the pumps from force of habit. It's really ridiculous to stay below any longer, Captain. We gave the bloody old tub more than she could stand, and she's peacefully chucked it up. She's sinkin' very quiet and decent, I'll say that for her."

"'Tis time we said good-by to her," quoth O'Shea. "Draw your fires, if you can, Mr. Kittridge, and I will get the boats ready."

"I do seem to find trouble wherever I go," sadly murmured the chief engineer.

The men on deck took the news with no great

show of excitement. This was the kind of voyage which one could not reasonably expect to be commonplace. To have to escape from a sinking steamer was an episode, not a disaster. In few words, Captain O'Shea assured them that he had no intention of letting this uncomfortable little happening interfere with the business for which he had employed them. The insurance underwriters would be out of pocket, but who cared a rap for them, anyhow? Thereupon he issued orders, swiftly, intelligently, with masterful vehemence. The two boats which appeared most serviceable were swung outboard and held ready to launch. They would hold a dozen men each without crowding. Water-kegs were filled, the galley and store-room ransacked for tins of meat and biscuit, bags of potatoes and rice. The fire-arms and cutlasses were served out and the cases of ammunition divided between the two boats. Meanwhile the *Whang Ho* continued to sink with a certain dignity and decorum. One could find nothing dramatic in this shipwreck. Every one moved with haste, but there was no outcry.

Only one mischance marred the exodus from the *Whang Ho*. All hands were absorbed, and quite naturally, in delaying their departure as little as possible. Delay meant something worse than wet feet. In fact, the main deck was almost level with the water when the boats were ready to shove clear. For once the *Whang Ho* had moved rapidly, although in a lamentable direction. With so much to do in so short a time, it was not extraordinary that the

vigilant espionage which surrounded Charley Tong Sin should be relaxed, not to say forgotten, for a moment. Even Captain O'Shea neglected to keep an eye on him, the business of abandoning ship on a dark night at excessively short notice being calculated to tax the resources of the most capable commander.

The comprador took advantage of these distractions to erase himself from the scene. The boats were held against the side of the steamer, while the captain took tally of the men in them, scrambling from one boat to the other with a globe lantern swinging in his fist. Charley Tong Sin was indubitably missing. O'Shea leaped on board the moribund *Whang Ho*, which was now sobbing and gurgling tremendously, and made a flying search of the cabins and state-rooms. It was obvious that this elusive young Chinese had not vanished below decks, where by now nothing but a fish could exist. And unless Captain Michael O'Shea wished to join the fishes, it was time for him to go.

Chagrined and anxious, he returned to his boat, and the men frantically plied oars. A moment or two later the *Whang Ho* went under with very little fuss, meeting her end with the calm of a Chinese philosopher. The boats rocked in the waves that rolled away from the place where she had been, and the rays of the lanterns revealed many large and greasy bubbles.

Captain O'Shea wasted no time in sentimental regrets. The *Whang Ho* was a dead issue. What

vitality concerned him was the whereabouts of that valuable passenger, Charley Tong Sin. It was absurd to suppose that he had fallen overboard and given up the ghost. A rascal of his kidney had as many lives as a cat. It was much more plausible to surmise that he had unostentatiously laid hold of a life-belt, slipped over the stern, and made for the nearest shore. The boats moved to and fro, looking for him, but the darkness, misty and opaque, made it hopeless to discover the head of a swimmer who by this time might have left the water and concealed himself in the marsh.

"I misdoubt that me policy was sound," said Captain O'Shea to Mr. Kittridge. "Maybe I ought to have shot him, anyhow."

"It would ha' been a good job," grunted the chief engineer. "And now he'll streak it for this village of Wang-Li-Fu and give an alarm."

"Precisely that. But unless he can pick up a sampan or a fishing-boat he will make slow headway flounderin' through the swamps and swimming the creeks. 'Tis up to us to beat him to it."

Mr. Parkinson, who was in command of the other boat, was ordered to steer alongside for consultation. It was promptly agreed that the party should first find the mouth of the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells and then move up-stream without delay. It would be slow and blundering navigation, but if three or four miles could be traversed before daylight they might tie up to the bank and reconnoitre within striking distance of their goal.

"I do not know what kind of a mess we will hop into," O'Shea told them before the boats separated. "We may have to fight our way, thanks to that slippery divil of a comprador, and I am not asking ye to go anywhere that I will not go meself. Some of you are not trained to use weapons, but if ye will cut loose and blaze away and not think too much about your own skins, we can make it uncomfortable for a slather of Chinese. There is plenty of ammunition, so don't scrimp yourselves."

The boats slid slowly into the entrance of the wide, sluggish stream. The lanterns were extinguished. The only sound was the cadenced thump of the thole-pins. If any of the men felt the prickly chill of cowardice, they kept it to themselves. Now and then the keels furrowed the mud, and when the boats stranded hard and fast, the crews waded overboard and shoved them ahead. Thus the little flotilla progressed until dawn flushed the eastern sky and the vapors, streaming upward from the marshes, curled and drifted like filmy clouds. Higher ground and the green, checkered squares of tilled fields were discernible a short distance beyond.

The boats turned into the mouth of a tiny creek where the tall rushes curtailed them from observation. This was a favorable halting place, and a cold breakfast was hastily eaten. O'Shea had a poor opinion of fighting on an empty stomach. He addressed himself with marked deference to a very neatly dressed man with iron-gray hair who had said little during the voyage. His face was hag-

gard and his eyes were tired with weariness of living.

"You have seen service, sir, and ye have led drilled men," said O'Shea. "The cards are dealt, but from now on you can play them better than I. I will be obliged to ye for advice."

The cashiered officer looked grateful. This kind of recognition had power to move him. With a diffident manner, as if his professional opinion had long since ceased to interest any one, he replied:

"Most Chinese villages are walled. There will be at least one gate facing the river and two or three on the inland side. It is often awkward to make a landing under fire from boats. I suggest we divide our force. If you approve, Captain, I will take ten of the most active men and disembark here. We can fetch a wide circuit of the town, and it will not be difficult to make our way across the rice fields and ditches. You can put the rest of them in one boat and row up in front of the town, waiting in the stream until we are in a position to make a rush. Then we will drive home a simultaneous attack in front and rear."

"Napoleon could not beat it," heartily exclaimed O'Shea. "And if ye shoot fast enough and kick up a terrible racket, they will think ye are an army. What will the signal be?"

"Three rifle shots."

"Ay, ay, Mr. Bannister. 'Tis the sensible plan that ye take command of the army while I hoist the

rear-admiral's pennant over the navy. We have no reserves, but many a famous victory would have been missing from history if the lads that won them had waited for the reserves to come up."

The chosen ten forsook the boats and tramped off behind their soldierly leader. A few minutes later the expedition of Captain O'Shea got under way, his boat hugging the muddy shore and dodging behind its ragged indentations. It was not long before a wide curve of the river disclosed to view the tiled roofs, the crumbling brick wall, and the towered gate-ways of a village. In front of it were several rickety wharfs, or stagings, built of bamboo poles lashed together. At the outer end of one of these lay a two-masted junk, her hawse-holes painted to resemble two huge eyes. The tide had begun to ebb, and the junk was already heeled so that her deck sloped toward the river. This craft appeared to be deserted. No pigtailed heads bobbed behind the immensely heavy bulwarks. If the army officer had been a Napoleon, Captain O'Shea showed himself a Nelson.

"Pull like blazes for the junk yonder," he shouted to his men. "We will pile aboard her and take cover."

The junk was directly in front of the gate-way in the village wall, and perhaps a hundred yards distant from it. The intervening space was beach, a miry roadway, and a disorderly row of shanties made of drift-wood, with a few boats hauled out for repairs. The heavy timbers of the junk made her a nautical

fortress, and the high sides would be difficult of direct assault.

The men swung lustily at the oars, and the boat shot out into the open river. O'Shea steered wide of the village until he could turn and make directly for the junk. It was an admirable bit of strategy, but wholly wasted on this sleepy, shabby Chinese village. There was never a sign of a hostile demonstration. As an anticlimax the thing was absurd. A crowd of men, women, and children streamed out through the gate in the wall and stared with much excited chatter at the foreign invaders. Apparently their behavior meant no more than a harmless curiosity. Several garrulous old gentlemen squatted upon fragments of timber and pulled at their bamboo pipes while they discussed the singular visitation with the oracular demeanor of so many owls.

The bold O'Shea grinned sheepishly. His sensations were those of a man who beheld a heroic enterprise suddenly turned into low comedy. He glanced at the amused faces of his followers and said:

"'Tis not what ye might call a desperate resistance. Let us promenade ashore and look the town over."

They quitted their fortress and moved along the narrow, swaying staging of bamboo, their rifles ready for use in the event of an ambushade. The Chinese crowd promptly retreated in noisy confusion. O'Shea ordered a halt. After some delay, three signal shots came down the wind from Major Bannister's force. He was about to attack the village from the land-

ward side. Now the shopkeepers and coolies scuttled madly away from O'Shea's party to seek shelter within the walls and discover what all this extraordinary excitement could mean.

Behind them tramped the naval brigade into streets from which the inhabitants were vanishing as rapidly as possible. Somewhere near the centre of the town O'Shea and Major Bannister joined forces. This pair of valiant leaders eyed each other with mutually puzzled chagrin.

"We just walked in without the slightest trouble," confessed the army man. "What do you make of it?"

"I had the same experience," observed O'Shea. "And I do not know what to make of it at all. 'Twas me firm conviction that we were prancin' into a hornet's nest. The information all pointed that way. I would call it a funny kind of a surprise party."

"The villagers have no intention of making it unpleasant for us. They have been giving my men eggs and melons and chickens, to keep us good-natured, I presume."

"Well, we will find quarters and fetch our grub from the junk, and I will buy the drinks, if ye can locate them, for the joke seems to be on me."

They found the village tavern, consisting of several detached buildings set in a large court-yard. The agitated landlord kow-towed himself almost black in the face, and in trembling accents expressed his desire to bestow all his goods upon the warlike

foreigners if only his miserable life might be spared. He summarily ejected a few native guests of low degree, who fled without delaying to argue the matter. The invaders set the tavern coolies to sweeping and scrubbing the filthy buildings and took charge of the kitchen with its row of earthen fire-pots. There was no lack of room for men to sleep three and four in a row upon the *k'angs*, or brick platforms used for the purpose, and the ragged quilts were hung outside to air. In short, the tavern was transformed into a camp which had no serious discomforts.

Having taken care of his men, Captain O'Shea found leisure to ponder over the situation, a process which left him with a headache. He rambled unmolested from one end of the village to the other, searching for clues that might link themselves with the Painted Joss and the tragedy of Bill Maguire. There were two small, dilapidated temples, one of them inhabited by a few Buddhist priests in yellow robes. O'Shea was permitted to enter them and explore to his heart's content. They were nothing more than village shrines, however, in which the perfunctory rites were held and offerings made—such places as might have been seen in a thousand Chinese towns. Nor did the village itself, excepting for an air of general decay, differ from the hamlets of a dozen provinces.

"I have a harrowing suspicion that Charley Tong Sin made a monkey of me," ruefully sighed O'Shea, "or maybe I have been all wrong from the start. The Chinese proposition has too many twists in it for a white man to fathom."

As a person of considerable confidence in his ability to master difficulties, his self-esteem had been dealt a hard blow. His imagination had pictured a large, stirring climax of his pilgrimage, and here he was all adrift in a wretched little village of no consequence whatever, the last place in the world to find the headquarters of a secret organization so mysteriously powerful as to cast its sinister shadow throughout China, and even across the seas. And yet the evidence had been by no means vague and misleading. Beginning with the fragmentary revelations of the demented sailor, coming next to the disclosures of poor McDougal's diary, he had been led straight to the town of Wang-Li-Fu, on the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells. He had felt that the hand of destiny was guiding him.

Returning to the tavern yard O'Shea found his men cheerfully making friends of the villagers and accepting the situation with the ready adaptability of true soldiers of fortune. They looked to the leader for orders, but he had none to give them. He had been placed in the ridiculous position of providing wages and rations for a perfectly superfluous expeditionary force.

"Just what did you expect to turn up in this pigsty of a settlement?" gloomily inquired Mr. Kittridge, who seemed disappointed that he had not broken a few heads. "Whatever it was, it fell flat."

"It did that," frankly admitted O'Shea. "'Tis a painful subject, Mr. Kittridge, and we will not discuss it now. But I am not done with the riddle of Wang-Li-Fu."

Three days passed, and singly and in squads the invaders ransacked the village and its suburbs, poking into shops, alleys, dwellings, and court-yards and taking stock of the inmates thereof. That the people were very poor and very industrious was all that one could say of them. And they were no more to be suspected of plotting deeds of violence than so many rabbits. Doggedly persistent, unwilling to confess himself beaten, O'Shea shifted his quest to the open country for miles outside of Wang-Li-Fu. It was a region of green fields gridironed with ditches and rutted paths, and dotted with toilers in blue cotton blouses and straw hats, who tilled their crops from dawn to dark.

It was obviously useless to extend the investigation any considerable distance away from this region. If the secret was not to be unearthed in the vicinity of Wang-Li-Fu, then his conclusions had been all wrong. The villagers assured him that this was, in truth, none other than Wang-Li-Fu, and the baffled, perplexed O'Shea could not let go of the opinion that the goal was somewhere near at hand. Otherwise, why all the elaborate stratagems in Shanghai to thwart his voyage to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells?

He had imagined himself attacking a stronghold of some sort, a headquarters of desperate criminals who must be wiped out. But if that slippery com-prador Charley Tong Sin had carried a warning to the men of the Painted Joss, he must have fled elsewhere than to this commonplace, harmless vil-

lage. At any rate, it seemed absurd to tarry much longer in Wang-Li-Fu with a force of armed retainers.

At the end of a fortnight, O'Shea was of the opinion that his loyal legion had better seek to mend its fortunes in some other quarter. He was ashamed to look them in the face. The fiasco cut him to the quick. He had been as mad as poor Bill Maguire. In future he would stick to his trade as a shipmaster.

Meanwhile, the malarial poison of the marshes found its way into his blood. He failed to realize that he was ill, and paid no attention to the little flashes of fever that came by night and the creeping, chilly feeling that troubled him in the morning.

There came a day when he was unable to rise from the brick sleeping-platform. The fever increased, suddenly, violently. It caught him unprepared. His plan of retreat had not been announced, and now he was incapable of leadership. His mind alternated between delirium and stupor. When he talked it was of many inconsequential things. One might have said that the evil spirit of the Painted Joss had laid its spell of misfortune upon him. In the court-yard of the tavern his lieutenants held a conference.

"Can anybody make head or tail of this infernal situation?" gloomily inquired Mr. Kittridge. "What in hades are we going to do about it?"

"Try to pull Captain O'Shea through this fever before we think of anything else," stoutly affirmed Mr. Parkinson. "We jammed into this crazy voyage with our eyes shut. With all of us it was any-

thing to get clear of Shanghai. And it's useless business to sit and growl about it as hard luck. What do you say, Major Bannister?"

The army man smiled at sight of their discouraged countenances and quietly answered:

"What else can we chaps expect but hard luck? Really, I should be surprised to find anything else. I can tell you one thing, gentlemen. I have campaigned in the tropics, and I know something about this swamp fever. We had best get out of here and take Captain O'Shea with us. If we don't, he will die as sure as sunrise, and the rest of us will be down with it before long. It caught him first because he was fagged with worry."

"We agree with you there," said Mr. Parkinson. "But we seem to have overlooked a line of retreat. That was the Irish of it, I suppose. If we go down river in our two boats we'll have to work 'em out to sea over those nasty shoals and then run the chance of being picked up adrift. We might get away with it, but it would kill a man as sick as O'Shea."

"Why not go up-river?" suggested Major Bannister. "By means of a few words of Chinese and a great many gestures I have extracted from the village head-men the information that there is a European mission station about a hundred and fifty miles northwest of here. We can make part of the journey by boat and then hike overland. With a litter and coolies to carry it, we may be able to take Captain O'Shea through alive. It's better than letting him die in this pest-hole."

"That's the most sensible speech I've heard since we signed on," grunted Mr. Kittridge. "And you can pull out of this rotten Wang-Li-Fu not a minute too soon to please me."

The village head-men were summoned, and these venerable worthies declared themselves anxious to aid the sick leader of the foreign soldiers. He had played with their children, paid the shopkeepers their prices without dispute, and sat with the old men in the tea-houses. Nor had his armed force committed any abuses, although they held the village at their mercy. It was wisdom to try to carry Captain O'Shea to his own people. The village would gladly furnish a guide and plenty of coolies, a covered litter, and a small house-boat in which the sick man could be made comfortable.

The evacuation of Wang-Li-Fu was a dismal business. The adventurers were oppressed by a sense of failure and discouragement. Their enterprise had fizzled out like a dampened match. This final act was inglorious. Their plight was worse than when they had been stranded as beach-combers in Shanghai. They carried Captain O'Shea to a sampan, or flat-bottomed boat, with a tiny cabin of bamboo and matting, which could be towed against the sluggish current of the river. The men disposed themselves in the two boats saved from the *Whang Ho* steamer, and a squad of half-naked coolies strung themselves along a towing-rope to help track the sampan upstream.

The sick man lay stretched upon his quilts and showed little interest in the slow progress of the flo-

tilla. Between spells of heavy drowsiness he watched the slimy shore and fringing marsh slide past. Through the first day the wind was cool and the air bright, and the boats trailed up-river until after night-fall before they were pulled into the bank to moor. As the part of caution, no fires were made and conversation was hushed. The foreigners had an uncomfortable suspicion that this might be hostile territory, although they had discovered nothing to warrant the conjecture. But O'Shea had been babbling about the Painted Joss while flighty with fever, and Charley Tong Sin was still unaccounted for.

Between midnight and morning the sick man came out of his uneasy dreams. As it seemed to him, he was clear-headed, his senses alert, his judgment normal. Just why he should be cooped up in this native boat was a bit difficult to comprehend, but why try to understand it? There was only one problem of real importance. And now was the time to solve it. O'Shea laughed to think what a stupid, blundering fool he had been to recruit an armed expedition and come clattering into this corner of China with so much fuss and noise.

If a man wanted to find the Painted Joss, all he had to do was listen to the friendly, familiar voices that whispered in his ears. O'Shea could hear them now. He accepted them as a matter of course. His eyes were very bright as he pulled on his shoes and fumbled for the revolver in its holster under the pillow. Curiously enough, he was no longer con-

scious of great physical weakness. It was tremendously urgent that he should go to find the Painted Joss without a moment's delay. His men would not understand if he should tell them about the friendly voices that were offering to show him the way. They might try to restrain him. He must leave the boat quietly, unobserved.

Crawling from beneath the matting curtain, he gained the river bank. His knees were exceedingly shaky and his hands trembled uncertainly, but he was confident that he had found the trail of the Painted Joss and that his vigor would soon return. Charley Tong Sin outwit him? Nonsense! O'Shea would have been startled beyond measure to know that he was wandering off in delirium. He would have taken a shot at any one rash enough to tell him so.

Undetected he moved along the shore, silent as a red Indian, and was presently lost in the darkness. It was muddy walking, and he turned into the tall marsh grass, where a carpet of dead vegetation made firmer footing. Frequently he was compelled to halt and regain his labored breath, but his purpose was unwavering. The voices drove him on. He had no sense of fear. After some time his erratic progress led him back to the river. There he stumbled over a log and sat down to wait for daybreak, which had begun to flush the sky.

His head throbbed as though hammers were pounding it and waves of blurring dizziness troubled him. What was more disquieting, the guiding voices had

ceased to talk to him. He felt crushing disappointment and sadness. His eyes filled with tears.

Dawn found him seated dejectedly with his back propped against the log, his head drooping, while he stared at the muddy river. Here he would wait on the chance that his friends might find him. As the day brightened, his aimless vision was caught by something which powerfully awakened his weary, befogged perceptions. It acted as a stimulant of tremendous force. Sitting bolt upright he gazed at a footprint, cleanly outlined, which had become sun-dried and hardened in a stratum of clay.

It had been made by a leather sole and heel. The outline was pointed and narrow. Into O'Shea's quickened memory there flashed the picture of Charley Tong Sin stretched upon the cabin floor of the *Whang Ho* steamer, his patent-leather shoes waving gently as he went to sleep under the soporific influence of a knock-out blow. He felt absolutely certain that this particular print had been left by the fashionable footgear of the vanished comprador. The voices had guided him aright. It was here that Charley Tong Sin had come ashore after making his way up the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells in some kind of a native boat.

There was one chance in a million that O'Shea should have halted to wait in this precise spot where his eyes might see the thing. He dragged himself to his feet and scanned the melancholy landscape. There were no villages in sight; only the marsh and fields and a vast mound of débris to mark the place

where once had stood a city. Even the walls surrounding it had been levelled. It was scarcely more than a wide-spread excrescence of broken brick and tiling partly overgrown with vegetation. The landscape could have held no more desolate reminder of the wreckage left in the wake of the Tai Ping rebels.

It was plausible to surmise that this was the real Wang-Li-Fu, the city which O'Shea had set out to find. The squalid village much lower down the river might have been founded by refugees who gave the same name to their new abode. And the villagers had been too ignorant to explain the blunder. To them there was only one Wang-Li-Fu. How Charley Tong Sin must have laughed at leaving O'Shea and his men to waste themselves in a chase that led nowhere.

It was a pallid, unshaven, tottering ghost of Captain Michael O'Shea that mustered strength to walk very slowly in the direction of the ruined city. Once he paused and became irresolute, but a little way beyond he found the imprint of a narrow shoe of European workmanship on the soft bank of a ditch. His stumbling steps led him, as by an unerring divination, toward the highest part of the great mound of débris where tall trees grew from the crumbling masonry. His painful advance became less difficult when he found a path from which the obstructions had been removed.

Presently he stood looking across a cleared space in the midst of the ruins, invisible from river or highway. In it were several small buildings and one

much larger. The timbers set into its walls were carved and gilded, the curving roof of dull red tile. There was no living thing in sight. This isolated community was so situated that it was wholly concealed from strangers, and the natives of the region were apt to shun the blasted city as haunted by demons. No watchers were posted to guard against intrusion.

O'Shea crossed the open space and made for the large building, which had the aspect of a temple. Unhesitatingly he approached the massive wooden doors and found them ajar. He walked like a man in a trance, muttering to himself. Passing within, he entered a sort of anteroom partitioned by means of screens wonderfully embroidered. The stone pavement rang to the tread of his heels. The place echoed with emptiness. He pressed on and came into a room of greater extent. Its corners were lost in shadow. Rows of pillars supported the dusky rafters upon which gilded dragons seemed to writhe. The windows were small and set close to the roof and the light of early morning had not dispelled the gloom.

In the centre of the floor was an altar. Behind it towered an image of Buddha, and yet it was unlike the images of the bland and contemplative Buddha commonly to be found in the temples of the East. It was a monstrous thing. Only an artist with an inspiration from the devil could have so handled tools as to make those wooden features seem to lust after all abominable wickedness. The color of this

seated statue was crimson. Amid the shadows it glowed like fire or blood. On the breast, above the folded arms, stood out in broad, black strokes a Chinese symbol or character which O'Shea recognized with a sensation of creeping repugnance.

"The Painted Joss!" he gasped.

His attention was so strongly caught and held by this malevolent image that for the moment he had eyes for nothing else. Presently, however, he became aware that another figure confronted him, a living presence. It was a man sitting in a massive chair of teak-wood, by the side of the Buddha. The bulk of him was enormous. He was both fat and mighty of frame, and not even the towering amplitude of the image could dwarf his proportions and belittle the impression he conveyed. His face was broad and heavy-jowled, the mouth sensual and cruel. With folded arms he sat and gazed at the foreign intruder. This unflinching, scornful immobility had a certain distinction. He believed that he must instantly die at the hands of this European with the white, savage face and the blazing eyes who covered him with a revolver. It was futile to cry out and summon help. As is customary with Chinese in positions of authority, this high-priest of iniquity had gone to the temple to have audience with his servitors very early in the morning. They had not yet joined him and O'Shea was quick to read his own advantage.

It was right and just that he should slay this huge man in the crimson robe who ruled the temple of

the Painted Joss. He had come ten thousand miles to be judge and executioner. He was ready to kill and be killed in his turn. But the revolver was strangely heavy and it wavered so that he was unable to hold it at arm's length. A haze bothered his vision and he could not brush it from his eyes. Something was the matter with his knees. They were giving way. With an incoherent exclamation, O'Shea fell unconscious upon the stone flagging and the revolver clattered from his limp hand. He had paid the price of exertion beyond his strength.

When his senses returned there was in his mind only the dimmest recollection of how he came to be in this dreadful place. The vagaries of fever no longer possessed him. Clear-headed but wretchedly weak and nerveless, he gazed about him and discovered that he was alone in the unholy temple. The shadows were not so heavy on the pillars, the gilded rafters, and the marble altar. The crimson image of the seated Buddha loomed flamboyant and portentous and the Chinese symbol painted on its breast was boldly outlined.

There was no way of escape. The building was a most effectual prison. His revolver had been taken from him. He could not even fight and die like a man. The fact was that this desperate extremity lacked the proper sense of reality. It was so contrary to reason and he had such shadowy, confused ideas of what had preceded, that this was more like nightmare or delirium. And it seemed impossible that he should not presently find himself awake.

What most tenaciously persisted in his memory was the image of the huge man in the teak-wood chair. He was a vision which could not be denied. Such a one as he had power to sway the wills of others to his desires, to create and direct great enterprises and send his influence afar, but never for good. If he ordered murder done in distant places his secret edicts would be obeyed, nor would his agent dare to thwart him. If there was such an organization as O'Shea had assumed, then he had stood face to face with the dominant personality, the compelling force from which radiated infernal activities.

"I saw him, whether I am meself or somebody else," the prisoner muttered with a groan. "And he will come back and the brand will be chopped into me, same as was done to poor Bill Maguire. 'Tis a tough finish, if all this is really true. My God, I wish I knew what had happened to me. Yesterday I was going up-river with me men, and now——"

He struggled to his feet. A supreme effort of will conquered physical weakness. A man condemned to die is capable of forgetting bodily ills. Just then a young man appeared from the direction of the doorway. He wore native garments, but O'Shea recognized him. It was Charley Tong Sin, whose smile was unpleasant. In his hand was O'Shea's revolver, which he was careful to hold ready for use. The jaunty, affable manner of the comprador had returned. He appeared very well satisfied with himself as he exclaimed, by way of greeting:

"It is an unexpected pleasure, you bet, Captain O'Shea. I have waited till you were gone from Wang-Li-Fu. It was reported that you were very sick and went up the river yesterday with your men. You decided to come and see us, to visit the Painted Joss? You wished to make some trouble?"

"'Tis the last day I will make trouble for any one, by the looks of things," replied O'Shea. "You win, Charley."

"You are a smart man," grinned the other. "But you had too much curiosity. I am a good fellow. I will tell you what you want to know. You will not give it away. They are getting ready to cut your visit pretty short."

There was the chatter of voices somewhere outside and the brazen mutter of a gong. O'Shea kept silence. He was not as resigned to his fate as Charley Tong Sin inferred. He was watching every motion of the gloating young man and his eyes measured the distance between them.

"You will feel better if you know," tauntingly cried the Chinese. "You have seen the Painted Joss. You have seen a man sitting beside it, the great and terrible Chung himself, the ruler of the Pih-lien-Kiao, the *Sect of the Fatal Obligation*."

"Much obliged, Charley," grimly interrupted O'Shea. "Tell me some more. I am sorry I could not have words with the terrible Chung. And the brand that ye chop into people, your trademark?"

"It is the mark that means *The Dreadful Messenger*

of Chung. It is a favor to tell you, Captain O'Shea. No other foreigner, no Chinese except the servants of Chung, have heard it spoken. But you will not speak it anywhere."

"There's more that I want to know," said O'Shea, "though precious little good the information will do me."

"Ha! Why did you not have so much sense before and mind your own business?"

It was absurd to carry on such a dialogue as this, as O'Shea perceived, but Charley Tong Sin was enjoying this session with the rash shipmaster who had formerly held the upper hand. Before the victim could be subjected to further taunts he heard the massive doors opened and other sounds to indicate that bars were sliding into place to fasten them on the inside. The huge man in the crimson robe, the great and terrible Chung, lumbered into view and seated himself in the chair of teak-wood. Charley Tong Sin humbly bowed several times. The personage beckoned the twain nearer and spoke briefly. He desired to conduct a cross-examination of his own with the comprador as interpreter.

"He wishes to know why you have come to this place?" was the first question addressed to O'Shea.

"Because ye butchered a friend of mine, a red-headed sailor by the name of Jim Eldridge," was the unflinching reply. "He told me about your dirty devilment as well as he could, and I saw what ye did to him."

The huge man showed signs of consternation when

this was conveyed to him. He uttered a bellowing interrogation.

"He is not alive? You have talked with his ghost?" shrilly demanded Charley Tong Sin.

"'Twas him that sent me here," declared O'Shea.

"Ye can impart it to the big ugly mug yonder that I have had visits from the ghost of the red-headed sailor that he killed and branded."

With an excited, heedless gesture, Charley Tong Sin raised the revolver. He had been long accustomed to wearing European clothes, and the flowing sleeves of his Chinese outer garment impeded his motions. A fold of the silk fabric fell over the butt of the weapon, and he tried to brush it aside with his left hand. This other sleeve was caught and held for a moment by the sharp firing-pin of the cocked hammer.

This trifling mishap, gave O'Shea a desperate opportunity. With a flash of his normal agility he leaped across the intervening space. The comprador strove frantically to free the weapon, but only entangled it the more. The episode was closed before the crimson-robed personage could play a part. O'Shea's shoulder rammed Charley Tong Sin and sent him sprawling, and the revolver was instantly wrested from his grasp.

"The doors are locked," panted O'Shea, "and before your men break in, I will send the both of ye to hell. Sit where you are, ye terrible Chung. You overplayed your game, Charley."

The comprador seemed to shrink within his

clothes. His mouth hung open and his face was ashen. He was eager to clutch at any straw which might give him the chance of life. Shrinking from the scowling presence in the chair, he began to talk a sing-song babble of words that tumbled over each other.

"I will help you get away alive if you do not kill me. Captain O'Shea, I will explain about Jim Eldridge; I will not lie to you. All the secrets I will tell you. There was a steamer, the *Tai Yan*, and she came over the bar from the sea in a big storm, at the time of a flood. It was do this or go to the bottom because the engines had broke. A boat with sailors rowed up the river. They were foolish men who believed the stories that gold and silver treasure was hidden in the ruins of this old Wang-Li-Fu. And they found this temple, and they knew too much.

"All but two of the men were able to run quick to the river, but Eldridge and one named McDougal ran into this place, trying to hide. They ran into the temple before they were captured. There was a little building, but now it is ashes and much sticks of burnt wood. In that building those two men were locked to be killed next day. The red-headed man was a demon, I tell you. Walls could not hold him. In the night he set fire to the building, and it was a great blaze. But he was caught and punished."

"Ye left him for dead, and he came to," growled O'Shea. "And so McDougal got away!"

"I can tell you more secrets," wailed Charley Tong Sin, but his services as an informer were suddenly cut short. The huge man in the chair had raised his voice in a tremendous call for help to his followers without. Otherwise he had sat composed, glaring at O'Shea. It was his hand that slew Charley Tong Sin as a traitor. He was on his feet, the heavy chair raised aloft. He swung it with amazing ease. It was no longer a massive article of furniture, but a missile in the hands of a man of gigantic strength. His movements were not clumsy.

The chair flew through the air. O'Shea dodged, but Charley Tong Sin flung up his arms, taken un-awares. The impact would have brained an ox. The whirling mass of teak smote the terrified com-prador on the head and chest and he crumpled to the pavement. He was as dead as though he had been caught beneath the hammer of a pile-driver. The tableau was an extraordinary one. O'Shea stood staring at the broken body of the young Chinese. The man in the crimson robe stirred not from his tracks. Implacable, unafraid, he had executed the last sentence of *The Sect of the Fatal Obligation*.

The people outside were clamoring at the doors, and O'Shea heard the thud and crash of some kind of an improvised battering-ram. He sighed and found the thought of death at their hands very bitter. But he would not go alone. He faced the great and terrible Chung and slowly raised the revolver.

The arch-assassin bade him wait with a gesture

so imperious, so mandatory, that O'Shea hesitated. The bearing of the man held some large significance. His dark, evil countenance expressed rather sadness than wrath. He slid a hand into the folds of his robe and raised the hand to his mouth. Whatever it was that he swallowed wrought its work with swift and deadly virulence. Swaying like a tree about to fall, he strode to the marble altar and fell across it with his head buried in his arms. In this posture he died, in front of the image of the glowing Buddha, whose graven lineaments seemed to express the unholy ambitions and emotions of his own soul.

O'Shea managed to walk to a corner of the temple and slumped down upon a marble bench where the Painted Joss cast its deepest shadow. His strength had ebbed again. Listlessly, almost inattentive, he heard the assault upon the doors renewed and the splintering of plank. When the Chinese mob came tumbling in he could try to shoot straight and hit a few of them, and then they would close in on him. It was the end of the game.

A few minutes and the servitors of Chung came jostling and shouting through the anteroom. Then they halted abruptly. Their noise was hushed. The light that fell from the windows near the roof showed them the lifeless figure in the crimson robe, doubled across the marble altar. In the foreground lay the battered body of Charley Tong Sin, but they had eyes only for the tragedy of the altar. They stood dumfounded, like men in the presence of something incredible.

At length the boldest shuffled forward. The others followed timidly. They appeared terrified in the extreme. It was as though they had believed their master to be invulnerable. And he was dead. Possibly they conjectured that he had been slain by an agency more than mortal. The group of Chinese clustered about the altar, whispering, regarding the body of Chung. Apparently they had not bethought themselves of the foreigner who was held a prisoner in the temple.

O'Shea rose in his shadowy corner and moved wearily past the Painted Joss. It was better to have the thing finished. He came upon the Chinese like an apparition. Their wits were so fuddled that the sight of him had the effect of another shock. If he had been powerful enough to slay the mighty Chung, then the demons were his allies. Perceiving their dazed condition, he forebore to shoot, and advanced abreast of the altar. The path to the doorway was clear, but he had not the strength to make a run for it. The hope of life, miraculously restored to him, was in the possibility that they might stand and gaze at him a little longer.

He had walked a half-dozen steps farther when one of the crowd yelled. The spell was broken. They raced after him like wolves. He turned and steadied himself and pulled trigger until the revolver was empty. The onset was checked and thrown into bloody confusion. O'Shea had summarily convinced them that whether or not the demons were in league with him, the devil was in this ready weapon of his.

They were no longer massed between him and the exit, and for the moment the advantage undeniably belonged to this mysterious, devastating foreigner.

He stumbled over the broken timbers of the doors and was in the blessed daylight, the temple behind him. He would be overtaken ere he could flee the ruined city, but he reloaded the revolver as he followed the path at a staggering trot. The mob poured out of the temple, yelping in high-keyed chorus. As a foot-racer the hapless Captain Michael O'Shea was in excessively poor condition. In fact, it promised to be the easiest kind of a matter to overtake him and leisurely pelt him to death with bricks as soon as he should have expended his ammunition.

He swerved from the rough path and crawled to the top of a low ridge of débris. Standing erect for a moment, he pitched forward and fell against a bit of wall. His figure had been outlined against the sky, and it was discerned in a fleeting glimpse by a scattered band of men in khaki and linen clothes who were tramping the marsh. They raised a shout and rushed toward the ruined city, converging until the force was mobilized within a short distance of the prostrate O'Shea.

The Chinese mob, pursuing full-tilt, found itself confronting a score and more of rifles which enthusiastically opened fire until the air hummed with bullets. There was a hasty, unanimous retreat of the followers of Chung to the temple and the adjacent buildings. Major Bannister halted to bend over O'Shea and say:

"We thought you were drowned or bogged in the marsh. What sort of a rumpus is this?"

"The Painted Joss," murmured O'Shea. "I found it. Don't bother with me. Go to it and clean out the place."

The adventurers, at last earning their wages, proceeded to make things most unpleasant for the household of Chung. The resistance was brief, and those who were not penned within the temple fled in panic and sought cover in the marsh. They were taken by surprise, for the community had found the visit of Captain O'Shea sufficient to engage its attention. To him returned Major Bannister, hot and dusty, his cheek bleeding from the cut of a Chinese sword, and smilingly announced:

"Bully good fun while it lasted. What shall I do with the devils we cornered? Take them out and shoot them?"

"No. The boss of the works is dead. And I have a notion that *The Sect of the Fatal Obligation* died with him. Lug me to the temple, if ye please. I'm all in, but 'tis my wish to see the whole wicked business go up in smoke."

Before the torch was applied, that experienced man of war, Major Bannister, suggested that he had never seen a more promising place in which to poke about for loot. The search amounted to nothing until it occurred to the major to pull the Painted Joss from off its pedestal. After much heaving and prying the great image fell crashing to the pavement of the temple. Investigation revealed that underneath it were

several compartments accessible by means of cunningly fitted panels. Many papers or documents were found, wrapped in silk, and it was assumed that these were the records of the black deeds of Chung and his organized murderers. They were thrown aside, to be bundled together and taken to the boats.

It was the astute Major Bannister who smashed the bottom of one of these compartments with a rifle-butt and rammed his hand through the splintered hole. His groping fingers came in contact with closely packed rows of metal bars. In this manner was discovered the wealth of the temple, the blood-money stored and treasured by the infamous Chung, the price of many assassinations.

The gold was in stamped ingots, the silver in the lumps or "shoes" of the clumsy Chinese currency, and there were baskets of English sovereigns, Mexican dollars, and a variety of the coinages which pass over the counters of the money-changers of the Orient. Murder as a business had paid well. *The Sect of the Fatal Obligation* was a flourishing concern. The loot belonged to those who found it. They were troubled by no scruples respecting the heirs of the departed Chung, nor did they consider it their duty to surrender the spoils to the Chinese government.

That night a conflagration reddened the ruins of the dead city of Wang-Li-Fu. It was the pyre of the Painted Joss. And when the little flotilla again moved up-river early next morning, a cloud of smoke rose lazily in the still air. Captain Michael O'Shea was still alive, which was rather surprising,

for he had passed through experiences extremely disturbing to a sick man. There was tonic, however, in the fact that he had redeemed his failure, the expedition was no longer a sorry jest, and the account of Bill Maguire had been squared.

He slept with tremendous earnestness through a night and a day, and when he awoke it was to roar for food and to display the peevish temper of a genuine convalescent. When off duty his comrades became absorbed in the odd occupation of arranging piles of gold bars, silver "shoes," and minted coins on the deck of the little house-boat, like children playing with blocks. They smiled a great deal and talked to themselves. Captain O'Shea looked on with an air of fatherly interest. After all, this happy family of his had made a prosperous voyage of it. Dreams of rehabilitation cheered these broken wanderers. They would go home. No more for them the misery, the heartache, the humiliation of the tropical tramp. Their riches might slip through their fingers, but they would make the most of golden opportunity. Like poor McDougal, they had thrown all regrets away.

"'Tis share and share alike," said O'Shea, "but there is a red-headed sailor-man at anchor on a farm in Maine and I think he has a wife somewheres. With your permission we will deal him a share of the plunder. 'Twas poor Bill Maguire that gave us the tip."

Unmindful of labor and hardship, this contented company slowly journeyed to the head of navigation on the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells and then

trudged overland while O'Shea rode in a covered chair and sang old sea-chanties in a mellow voice. When, at length, the English mission station was reached it was stretching the truth to call him an invalid. The senior missionary, a gentle, very wise old man who had lived for thirty years in the back country, heard the tale told by these tanned, ragged travellers and was horrified that such things should have existed. But he had news for them, and it was thus that he supplied a missing fragment of the puzzle of Bill Maguire:

"The man came here and we took care of him. But there was no finding out how he had been so frightfully hurt. He was dumb and stupid. Later I met a native boatman who had found him on the river-bank near Wang-Li-Fu. Evidently he had been thrown into the water as an easy way to get rid of the body. Reviving a little, he splashed his way ashore or the tide left him there. He stayed with us until he was fairly strong and one morning he was gone."

"And did he set the house afire?" inquired O'Shea.

"Why, there were two accidental fires in the compound at that time, but we laid it to the carelessness of the kitchen coolies," was the innocent reply.

"It was Bill Maguire, all right," declared O'Shea.

"Now, will ye be good enough to look over the Chinese documents we found hid away under the Painted Joss?"

The missionary pored over the papers for several hours. And his painstaking translation revealed all

that O'Shea cared to know concerning the operations of *The Sect of the Fatal Obligation*. It had worked in secret to remove enemies for a price. If a merchant wished a business rival obliterated, if an official found others in his way, if it was advantageous to create a vacancy in some other quarter, the murder guild directed by the departed Chung would transact the affair, smoothly, without bungling. And those who knew and would have disclosed the secret were frightened into silence by the sight of the brand that was called *The Dreadful Messenger of Chung*.

"It will interest you to learn, as an American, Captain O'Shea," said the missionary, "that among these documents is a list of persons proscribed or sentenced to be slain. The most conspicuous name I find to be that of the Chinese ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Hao Su Ting. It is probable that this terrible fate would have awaited him upon his return to his own country."

"They potted his brother," exclaimed O'Shea. "And he was sick with fear of the thing, for I talked it over with him meself. Well, he can thank Bill Maguire for letting him die in his bed when his proper time comes."

Three weeks later Captain O'Shea sat at his ease upon the piazza of the Grand Hotel, that overlooks Yokohama Bay. He was thinner than when he had put to sea in the *Whang Ho* steamer, but he appeared to find the game of life quite worth while. It was his pleasure to enjoy the tame diversions of a tourist before boarding a mail-boat for the long run home

to San Francisco. He smiled as he reread a letter written in the crabbed fist of that zealous agriculturist, Johnny Kent, who had this to say:

DEAR CAPTAIN MIKE:

The Lord only knows what trouble you'll be in when this gets to China. My advice is to quit it and come home. I'm worried about you. Bill Maguire has rounded to, understand? His busted main hatch sort of mended itself by degrees. He had symptoms before you left, and you ought to have waited, but I suppose you can't help being young and Irish.

He was terrible melancholy at first, and he ain't real spry yet. I found his wife and little girl for him in Baltimore, and made them come on here. You guessed right about the wax doll. I bought the darndest, biggest one I could find. Bill feels that the family is living on my charity, and being morbid and down-hearted, he frets a whole lot about being broke and stranded. He'll be no good to go to sea again. It gives him the shivers to talk about it. I don't need him as a farm-hand in the winter, and as for having his wife as a steady house-keeper, I'm fussy and set in my ways.

Bill got up against an awful bad combination in China. I won't tell you where it was, for I don't want you to find it. Maybe you'll run across a man named McDougal out there. He was with Bill when they got in trouble. Bill saw a chance to get away in the night, but he stood the crowd off somehow to give McDougal leeway to join him. And this McDougal lit out with never a thought for Bill. There was something wrong with McDougal, as I figure it out. Maybe he was a good man, but here was one time when he fell down on his job. None of us say much about it, Captain Mike, but we all pray we won't get caught that way. You know what I mean. We're afraid there may be a weak spot in us that we don't know is there until we have to face the music. Anyhow, as I gather from Bill, McDougal was a quitter.

If I know anything about men, he has wished a hundred times since that he had stayed to take his medicine with Bill. We would a heap sight rather see you come home alive than to go monkeying with the Painted Joss. Nothing much has happened except a dry spell in August and corn and potatoes set back. Hens are laying well.

Your friend,

J. KENT.

Captain O'Shea chuckled and then became thoughtful. Paddy Blake and McDougal. Charley Tong Sin and the wreck of the *Whang Ho*. Wang-Li-Fu and the terrible Chung. Much can happen within the space of a few weeks to a man that will seek the long trail. Presently he took from his leather bill-book several slips of paper which he had received from the Yokohama Specie Bank in exchange for his gold bars and silver "shoes." After making sundry calculations with a pencil, he said to himself:

"The share of Jim Eldridge, alias Bill Maguire, is nine thousand eight hundred and sixty-two dollars and eleven cents, and 'tis here all ship-shape in two drafts on New York. My piece of the loot is the same. But the red-headed sailorman will never be the lad he was, and he should not be worried by the lack of money to live on. And could any money pay for what he went through? 'Tis easy to know what I should do. I will not take a cent of the plunder. My share I will give to Bill, and with his bit of it he will be comfortably fixed."

An expression of boyish satisfaction brightened his resolute features as he added:

"A man would be ashamed to take money for such a pleasant vacation as this one has been. Now, I will send a cable message to Bill Maguire and it will cheer him a lot. His account is squared. And I think I have put a crimp in *The Sect of the Fatal Obligation*."

THE END

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